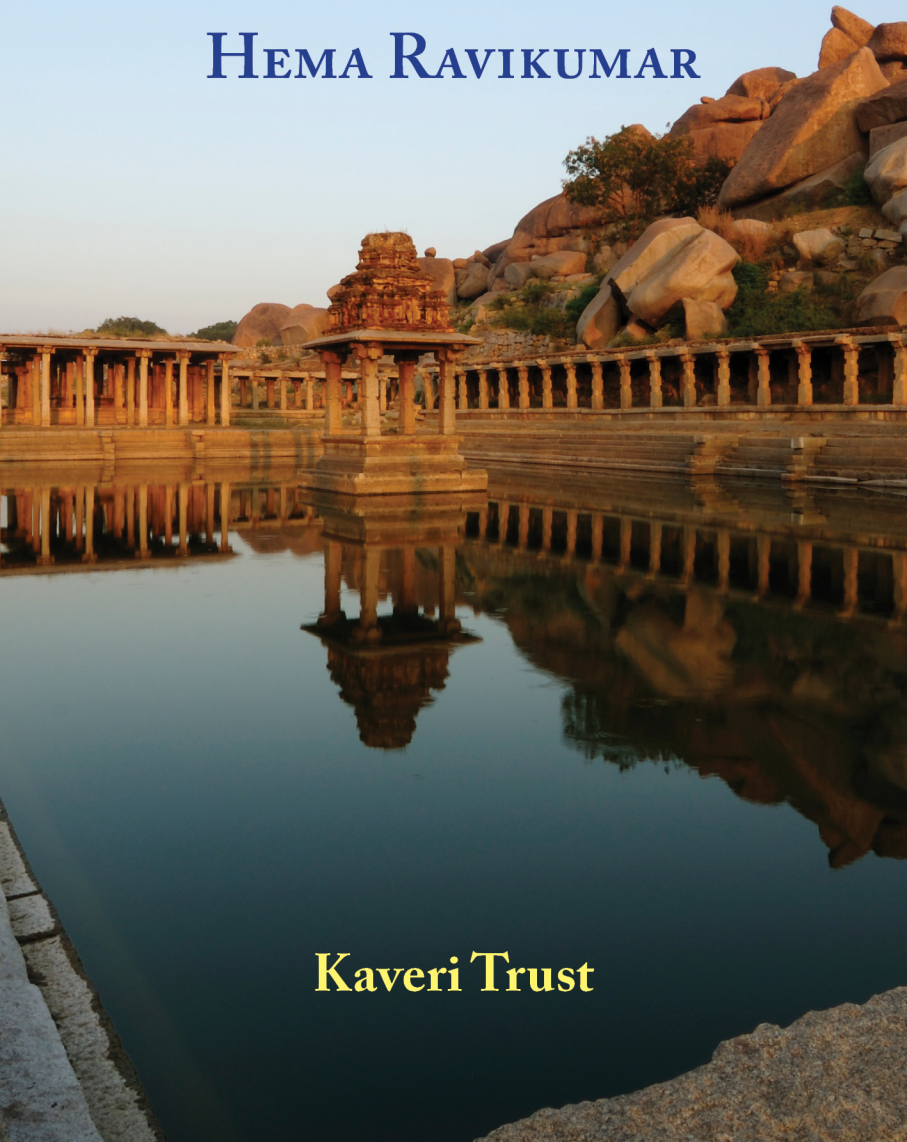
Cherished Moments

Hema Ravikumar



Kaveri Trust

Cherished Moments

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by Hema Ravikumar

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by M V Ravikumar

Cherished Moments

Hema Ravikumar

Kaveri Trust
Bengaluru, India

Dedicated to the memory of my uncle
Sri S Rangarajan (1930–2022)
and to my aunt
Smt. Shanti Rangarajan (*b.* 1934)

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Foreword

by **Dr. Sandhya Ravi**

I WAS PLEASANTLY surprised and honoured by Hema's request to me – to write the foreword for her booklet, which is a compilation of cherished memories. Hema and her family are no strangers to me; I have always been fascinated by the snippets that have wafted towards me, of their incredibly talented lives.

Since 2023, I have been in touch with Hema more frequently for various reasons and have been awestruck by her attitude—one that is calm, accepting, enthusiastic, forbearing, and embracing change with dignity. Perhaps the Sanskrit word *titiksha* sums it up.

It is wonderful that it is precisely this nature of hers that has nudged her to chronicle the many cherished moments of her life, to be read and to be savoured.

Life throws many crises our way – we could drown in them or motivate ourselves to emerge stronger, seeking peace and love.

"Memory… is the diary that we all carry about with us," said Oscar Wilde. They could bring back moments to cherish or moments of anguish. Weaving the events in one's life into a beautiful tapestry is an admirable skill. Capturing memories that are meant to be valued is what this collection is about. One finds family stories, shared experiences of celebrating beautiful moments with teachers, peers, friends, personal achievements, and even a couple of travelogues – all woven with love.

Reading through this, one gets a nostalgic peek into a beautiful world, a yearning for a bygone era where generosity, warmth, and moments of joy in simple conversations and gatherings were the norm and so rare these days.

It is an impetus for us to reflect on our own treasured memories that will give us the peace and love that we desire.

I am grateful to Hema for choosing to share these stories and wish her many more moments to cherish!

—Dr. Sandhya Ravi M.B.B.S, M.S
Breast and General Surgeon
Managing Director, *Prameya Health Pvt. Ltd.*

Publisher's Note

Over the last two decades, *Kaveri Trust* has had the pleasure of publishing a dozen books with the main objective of sharing life experiences of some of my family members—while this helps from the perspective of documentation, it is also a chance to share the joy that we have derived from our lives.

Hema, one of the Founder-Trustees of the *Trust* had written two books – *Sixty Years, Sixty Episodes* (published on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday in February 2017) and *Song of my Soul*, reminiscing her life after undergoing a traumatic experience, following a major surgery for malignant tumour (published on the occasion of my mother's 96th birthday in March 2023).

My mother, who suffers from dementia, along with Hema shifted to *Viraja Apartments,* Malleswaram in December 2023. Instead of them depending only on me, who is also a cancer and

Covid survivor, they would have better support with our son Hari living next door, Hema's cousin Vidya (as well as Hema's uncle and aunt) living in the same apartment complex, and my younger sister Ramaa and her husband Gopi living nearby. In addition, Hema's music *guru Smt*. Singaramma also lives nearby.

I have never seen Hema wasting a minute since the time we got married. After settling down at *Viraja*, Hema was as active as ever from morning 5.30 am to night 9.30 pm – not just taking care of herself and my mother, but continuing with her music, cooking, knitting, stitching, reading interesting books, meeting her old friends and teachers, feeding Hari's friends, and many more! Sometime in January this year, I suggested to Hema to write a little about moments that she had cherished, post surgery, mainly after settling down at *Viraja*.

She has put together forty-five episodes in this book, perhaps to signify the number of years we have been together. It's personally gratifying to me that the book will be released on the day I turn seventy-five!

M V Ravikumar PhD
MANAGING TRUSTEE
Kaveri Trust

Acknowledgements

I GET EASILY amused even with day-to-day events. So, I started writing down a few anecdotes and situations that not only amused me but also left enjoyable memories. A collection of such anecdotes is this book.

I would not have taken up writing but for the assured support of my immediate family. Ravi, as usual, encouraged me to write a book, suggesting the title as well. This was meant to be a sequel to *Song of my Soul* that was published in March 2023. With the help of AI, he edited the first cut of my draft. Ram helped me with the typing, giving me appropriate suggestions, collecting suitable photographs, and helping with the logistics. As always, Hari did everything essential for publishing—editing, fine-tuning, typesetting, designing, and coordinating with the printer. I offer my sincere thanks to all of them.

Thanks to my cousin Anu who read the final manuscript minutes before it was dispatched to the press and gave me some valuable edits.

My humble thanks to my extended family, friends, and well-wishers who are instrumental in me writing this book. But for their love and affection, I could not have cherished these moments.

In spite of her hectic schedule, Dr. Sandhya Ravi, General Oncology Consultant, Breast Cancer Surgeon, and Cofounder of *Prameya Health*, has been extremely kind and generous in sparing her valuable time to go through the book and writing the Foreword. I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

I could not have been what I am today, without the abundant blessings of my parents, ancestors, and the Almighty. My humble *pranam*s to them!

ॐ तत् सत्

सर्वं श्रीकृष्णार्पणमस्तु

H. R.

Author's Preface

In our lives, we all go through some crisis or the other. We tend to learn a whole lot of new things while trying to solve them. My policy has been the following – accept the realities, try and adjust to the situation, find a solution but never to brood. I have tried this and found tremendous benefits. It has always helped me to move forward.

In 2015, I took voluntary retirement before superannuation due to health issues. I started giving more time for myself and my family and slowly involved myself with my hobbies. In 2021, Indiramma, Ravi, Ram, and me were down with Covid but we managed the situation and we were back to normal—at least that is what I thought. But during the second half of 2022, I had severe body pain. It was diagnosed as a relapse of my cancer and I had to undergo a major emergency surgery in October. It took me a few months to

overcome the trauma. I started to recover, thanks to the support of my family and well-wishers. Once I was mobile, I gradually started doing my work and even continued with my hobbies.

In early December 2023, I moved to *Viraja Apartments** along with Indiramma. For the time being, we have settled down here. Though I may be taking care of her most of the time, it has been a team effort. All the family members come here as often as possible and support me. I am able go around to nearby places and even travel on my own. That has enhanced my confidence.

My learning has multiplied many folds after coming to *Viraja*. I am able to read many more books, listen to a lot of lectures, and continue with my music and handicrafts, although I miss my family and *Srinivasa Nilayam* – our ancestral home in Halasuru. I feel that I am not able to do my duty as wife and mother. But I have realized that when there is a larger purpose and priorities have become different, I will have to let go a few things. What I have learnt in the past few years is much

* Until 2003, *Viraja* was my grandparents' home; then it was converted into *Viraja Apartments*. I was fortunate to spend almost the first two decades of my life in my grand-parents' spacious home.

more than what I learnt over six decades of my life. This has given me immense satisfaction.

I spent two decades of my early life in *Viraja* and now it is a sheer coincidence that I am back here (at *Viraja Apartments*) due to the blessings of my ancestors and parents.

I have to be on medication continuously—at least that's what the doctors say. I have accepted the reality and I know that this is going to be a way of life for me. I am ever thankful to the Almighty for keeping me stable and making me to stand on my own feet. That is when I started *cherishing some moments* in the last couple of years!

H. R.

Visit to Anandam

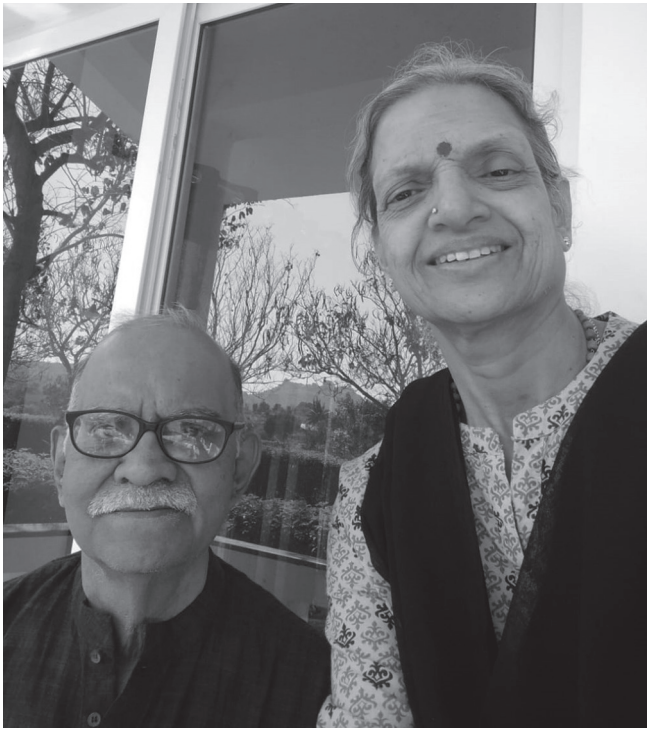
A JOURNEY OF HEALING AND INSPIRATION

In the middle of February 2023, Ravi drove me to *Anandam*, our retirement home near Chikkaballapura, approximately 85 kilometers from our residence. I was recovering from a major surgery that I underwent in October 2022 but was struggling with a persistent dry cough since January 2023. The cough had totally silenced me, leaving me anxious and reluctant to speak.

To lift my spirits, Ravi suggested that I write a sequel to my earlier book *Sixty Years, Sixty Episodes*. He proposed a title – *Song of my Soul*, and provided a framework also to guide my writing.

Initially, I was hesitant, as my condition had dampened my motivation. However, Ravi's gentle encouragement sparked my interest, and I began writing a few pages at home, continuing my work at *Anandam*.

The visit to *Anandam* was a refreshing break. The serene surroundings and the companionship of a few friends rejuvenated me. For two days, I immersed myself in the tranquil atmosphere, which fuelled my creativity. Ravi thoughtfully brought my meals from the canteen, allowing me to focus on my writing.



I hadn't driven the car for some months, so I decided to test my abilities within the premises of the gated community—where else would I find traffic-free roads! The short drive around *Anandam* boosted my confidence significantly.

Before departing the next morning, we visited a beautifully maintained Devi temple recently constructed on the campus. The priest had not yet arrived, so I sat outside the *sanctum sanctorum*. Inspired by the moment, I attempted to sing a *bhajan*. To my astonishment, I completed the song without a single cough. It was a turning point—my voice began to return.

I believe that the Goddess's blessings restored my voice. As we were about to leave, our friend Sridhar hurriedly came there and gave us a few *rudraksh*is, asking us to keep them safely for our good health. We were touched by his gesture.

From that day, I gradually regained my ability to speak, marking a significant step in my recovery.

———

My Journey with Prameya

Following my surgery in October 2022, I consulted Dr. Poonam Patil at *Manipal Hospitals*. She recommended that I meet Dr. Sandhya Ravi, her former colleague, who runs a wellness clinic in Jayanagar focused on holistic patient care.

I had met Dr. Sandhya in the mid-1990s at my cousin Dr. Mukund's wedding. Mukund's wife Jayashree is Sandhya's first cousin. In April 2023, Ravi accompanied me to her clinic, where we had an informal discussion. Sandhya reassured me that I was on the right path with my medication and encouraged me to continue.

Sandhya introduced me to her organization, *Prameya Health Integrated Holistic Women's Wellness Center*, which she and her team of professionals founded nearly a decade ago to foster healthy communities. Their approach, the FENS (Functional – Emotional – Nutritional – Spiritual) program, addresses well-being holistically. She then shared

details about *Pranasakhi*, an online community for patients and caregivers, which I promptly joined.

Her team comprises of allopathy and *Ayurveda* doctors, naturopaths, *yoga* experts, nutritionists, counselors, psychologists, artists, financial advisors, environmentalists, and more. Together, they work tirelessly to support individuals with physical and psychological health challenges.

Prameya's online programs, often led by the dynamic Dr. Manasa, are engaging, informative, and motivating. Manasa's innovative introductions inspire active participation from members. Further, the organization hosts in-person events once or twice a year, allowing us to interact with professionals and fellow members.

These programs have significantly improved my well-being and I've recommended *Pranasakhi* to several relatives and friends. I am deeply grateful to Sandhya and her dedicated team for helping me feel healthy and happy despite many challenges.

#003, Viraja Apartments

A NEW CHAPTER IN LIFE

Anu and Chandra's flat, #003 *Viraja Apartments* in Malleswaram, had been vacant for some time. They suggested that Indiramma and I move there, because it is quite a peaceful residential area with plenty of trees, ample sunlight, and ideal for morning and evening walks—quite different from the hustle and bustle of *Srinivasa Nilayam*, Halasuru.

Having lived at *Srinivasa Nilayam* for nearly eight decades, my mother-in-law was reluctant to leave her home. But Ravi and Hari encouraged us to try staying at *Viraja* for a few days, with the option to return if she wished. It was not practical to prepare her mentally given her dementia, so I packed essentials for a short stay and after lunch one day, I gently asked her if she would like to go and stay in Malleswaram for a few days, for a change. She is familiar with Malleswaram because of the house *Om Shanti*, which was the home of

Prof. M Narayana Iyengar—Indiramma's mother-in-law's younger brother.

To our surprise, she agreed immediately, on the condition that I accompany her. I reassured her, and Hari drove us to *Viraja*. Ravi had arranged for our maid and office boy to welcome us, and we requested Vasu *mama*, Mythily *mami*, and Ramaa to be present when we arrived. Indiramma's face lit up seeing familiar faces. We settled her into a room with an attached bathroom near her bed. From the window, she watched trees swaying and school-children returning home, her excitement evident.

She asked me if we could stay at least for a week! Over time, we furnished the apartment, set up the kitchen, and hired a maid to ease my responsibilities. We moved in on December 7th, 2023, and have stayed ever since. She enjoys the frequent visitors, which brighten her days.

Managing here is easier, as the apartment is compact. I take morning walks when Hari stops by for coffee. Ravi and Ram visit often; Ramaa delights her mother with her songs whenever she comes. In January 2025, Indiramma expressed a desire to revisit *Srinivasa Nilayam*. We drove her there and she spent a joyful week reminiscing over old photos in the drawing room. She has since returned to *Viraja*, content and settled.

New Additions

AND FAMILY GATHERINGS

There have been a few new additions to the family circle in recent years, bringing immense happiness. My niece Anita married Mike in September 2017, and their first son Nikhil (Nik) was born on June 26th, 2021. Two years later, their second son Jayanth (Jay) arrived on June 19th, 2023. Prasad and Malathi are proud grandparents to these two adorable kids, filling their lives with love and laughter.

Prasad, an avid photographer, frequently shares delightful pictures and videos of Nik and Jay, often accompanied by his signature witty captions. Both children are charming and remarkably well-mannered. They have been trained to eat independently from a young age, a testament to Anita's nurturing.

Nik, is impressively independent for his age. He loves watering plants, helps his mom in the kitchen, takes photos like his grandfather, and

plays with his toys and friends. Little Jay, is equally endearing, always watching his older brother and trying to mimic him. While Nik has learned to move chess pawns, Jay has mastered the art of sitting beside the chessboard—rather than on it! We're all eagerly awaiting the chance to meet them in person.

Malathi and Prasad step in to care for the boys whenever Anita is busy, teaching them new skills and showering them with love. I knitted sweaters for Nik and Jay and sent them through Malathi. When Anita shared pictures of the boys wearing them, my heart swelled with joy. While readymade clothes are plentiful, there is a unique satisfaction in seeing the children wear something crafted especially for them.

Recently, my cousin Kirti (Sweety) hosted a delightful lunch at *Taj West End*, where we met her charming four-year-old granddaughter, Suri. The gathering was a heart-warming reunion, bringing together nephews, nieces, cousins, aunts, and uncles—some of whom we hadn't seen in 25 to 30 years. I reconnected with Sweety's sons, Cookie and Chilly, whom I hadn't seen in nearly two decades. They are around the same age as my sons, Hari and Ram. We also met Cookie's wife, Swati, for the first time, though we missed meeting Chilly's wife, Puja. Little Suri stole the show with her friendly nature and confident demeanour. Remarkably independent for her age, she mingled effortlessly with everyone, chatting animatedly and spreading joy. The afternoon was filled with

nostalgia as we reminisced about old times, thanks to Sweety's warm hospitality.

These new additions have brought our family closer, filling our lives with love, laughter, and precious memories. We look forward to many more moments together, celebrating the bonds that tie us across generations.

Jay – Jai

One fine morning last year, Anita texted me saying her three-year-old son, Nikhil, wanted to see his 'Hema *paati*' —that's me! She asked if I was free for a video call. I was thrilled. I replied, "Of course I am!"

Soon, Nik appeared on the screen, waving his hands and shaking his head adorably. In his sweet musical voice, he said, "Love you, Hema *paati*!"

I responded, "I love you too, dear," and we shared some playful baby talks.

Anita mentioned that Nik enjoys listening to *bhajan*s and asked if I could share some recordings. The next day, I sang a couple of *bhajan*s and shared the recordings with her. Anita then played the recordings while Nik and his one-year-old brother Jay were eating their breakfast. To her surprise, Nik was disappointed. He thought that the *bhajan*s, with phrases like 'Govinda jai jai, Gopala jai jai'

and 'Jai jagadisha hare,' were meant only for Jay and not for him because of the word '*jai*' in them!

When Anita shared this, I couldn't stop laughing. It was a delightful reminder of how simple, thoughtful, and wonderfully unique a child's perspective can be!

Arun and Shruti Wedding

In August 2023, Prasad, Malathi, and Arun visited Bangalore. We held a get together of immediate family members at *Srinivasa Nilayam*. During this visit, Prasad and Malathi extended a heartfelt invitation to Arun's wedding, which was scheduled for February 18th, 2024, at the *Livermore Shiva Vishnu Temple* in California. They hoped at least one or two of us could attend the wedding.

Due to health concerns, I found traveling to the US impractical, despite my doctor's assurance of my fitness. Hari made every effort to attend but was unable to secure a visa.

On the wedding day, we watched the entire ceremony live on our TV from the comfort of our home. The event was meticulously planned, beautifully organized, and performed in a very traditional manner, with careful attention to every detail. Malathi's artistic touch was evident in the stunning venue decorations.

Arun looked regal in his traditional attire, chanting *mantra*s with clarity and grace—*Amma*, *appa*, and our grandparents would have been very happy to witness this! Shruti radiated beauty in her traditional dress and makeup, perfectly complementing the occasion. Cousin Ambi provided lively English commentary interspersed with Sanskrit *mantra*s, infusing his signature humour. His explanations of the rituals were both enlightening and entertaining, earning appreciation from all attendees. As relatives gathered, we enjoyed spotting familiar faces on the screen. It was a joy to see Mike and Anita in traditional attire with their children, Nikhil and Jayant.

The wedding also gave us a chance to reconnect virtually with relatives we hadn't seen in years.

Arun and Shruti are now happily settled in San Francisco with their adorable dog, Olly, building a beautiful life together.

Lost but Immediately Found

Soon after we moved to *Viraja Apartments*, an elderly couple, *Smt*. Sridevi and *Sri* Murthy, came to stay on the third floor. I met them a couple of times while going to the terrace. Sridevi *mami* often visited our home to see Indiramma.

One morning, as I entered the lift to go upstairs, I noticed a transparent cover containing currency notes of various denominations. I picked it up, returned home, and informed Vasu *mama* and Hari about it. They promptly posted a message on the *Viraja Apartments* group, asking if anyone had lost money. But there was no response. We surmised that the cover belongs to an outsider, because many people—including milk, food, newspaper, and grocery delivery personnel, as well as visitors—frequented the building.

Suddenly, Hari realized that the elderly couple had not yet been included in the *Viraja* mailing

list. He casually visited them to inquire if they had lost any money that morning. Murthy *mama* immediately confirmed, describing the different currencies in the transparent cover. We were overjoyed to have found the owner so easily, while Murthy *mama* was thrilled to recover the cover intact, feeling as though he had earned the money anew!

Probably I took the lift right after him, which is why the cover caught my eye. It was a fortunate coincidence, and I felt immense joy in helping him recover his money.

Crochet Mami

A JOURNEY OF LEARNING

My crochet skills have significantly improved since moving to *Viraja*, thanks to Mythily *mami*, who introduced me to her friend, *Smt*. Padma Srinivasan, an accomplished crochet enthusiast. Meeting Padma *mami* was a delight—she is warm, welcoming, and encouraging. Her expertise helped me understand the nuances of crochet and she clarified many of my doubts. Under her guidance, I crafted several woollen jackets and went on to create caps, sweaters, frocks for children, mobile pouches, spectacle covers, baby frock key-chains, mufflers, ponchos, and hand-bags. Reading crochet patterns was initially challenging for me, but Padma *mami*'s patient teaching made it accessible. I can now follow patterns and create simple designs independently. Whenever I complete a new project, I eagerly show it to Padma *mami*, and her joy is infectious. She always has something new to

share, inspiring me further. She is at least eighty-five but her enthusiasm is undimmed. Living alone, she stays vibrant and engaged, actively contributing her creations to an organization that supports those in need.

Padma *mami* is a true role model, demonstrating how to live meaningfully even in the later years of life. I am deeply grateful to her for her guidance and inspiration.

A Chola Temple

...IN OUR BACKYARD

In March 2023, I learned about the *Chokkanatha Swamy Temple*, a Chola-era temple in Domlur, just two kilometres from our ancestral home in Halasuru. Excited, I shared this discovery with my good friend Chandrakala, who is passionate about temples.

Two days later, Chandrakala called and asked me to spare a few hours the following morning. To my surprise, she had arranged a car and planned to visit the temple with her sister Sudha and friend Lalitha, picking me up at 9 am. I was touched by her enthusiasm, especially since they were traveling 15 kms. to take me to a temple so close to our home!

We reached the *Chokkanatha Swamy Temple* in no time. Said to be 1,200 years old, it is considered the oldest Vishnu temple in Bangalore. The temple

features ten '*pranic*' energy points where devotees stand for a few minutes to pray and feel rejuvenated. We had a wonderful *darshana* of Chokkanatha Perumal, Sridevi, and Bhudevi, leaving us feeling deeply blessed.

We also visited a nearby *Suryanarayana Temple* which is built in more recent times. It is spacious and well maintained. I was very much attracted by the beautiful carvings on the pillars. We spent some quiet time and returned home.

I've visited the ancient Chola-era *Someshwara Temple* in front of our home—our 'front yard'—countless times. But I was astonished at my own ignorance of this equally magnificent Chola-era temple, in our 'backyard!'

Temple Visits

Last June, Ravi had some work in Pondicherry just for a day and so I too joined him. We left in the morning by car and reached there around lunch time. After Ravi finished his work, we visited the *Aurobindo Ashram*. There was absolute silence there. We then visited an old, powerful *Vinayakar Temple* near the *Ashram*—this had been suggested to us by Suhas. It is a huge temple with many Ganesha statues and beautiful paintings all around the corridors and also on the ceilings. The temple was full with people and had a festive look with a lot of buzz and activity, a thorough contrast to the *Ashram* premises!

On our way back, we visited the *Panchamukha Anjaneya Temple* at Panchavti. It is a nice temple with beautiful paintings on the walls as well as on the ceilings. There is a beautiful Pattabhishekha Ramar *sannidhi* in the premises. Here we get to see the entire family of Rama: Sita, Lakshmana,

Bharata, Shatrughna, the *rishi*s Atri and Vasishta, and also Anjaneya, Sugriva, and Vibhishana.

Incidentally that day (26th June), three of our family members—Shanta *shitti*, Jayashree, and little Nikhil celebrated their birthdays. And so we performed an *archane* in their names.

I wanted to visit Kalale and Nanjanagud for a long time. Last year, I accompanied Ravi to Mysore when he went to attend one of his *Rotary* meetings. After his meeting we went around the Mysore Palace and dropped by to the lovely *Bhuvarahaswamy Temple*, which is just inside the palace, close to the gate.

There were very few devotees inside, so we were able to spend some peaceful time inside. We felt delighted seeing the small but charming idol of Lakshmi sitting on the lap of Varahaswamy.

Next morning we went to Nanjanagud and had a nice *darshana* of Nanjundeshwara. We then went to Kalale which is hardly eight kilometres from there. The *Lakshmikanta Swamy and Aravinda Nayaki Temple* is said to be 1,300 years old. But the *mula-vigraha* is supposed to be 3,000 years old! It is a huge temple with several corridors with hundreds of stone pillars. There are many beautiful carvings all over the place.

❄

This January, I once again accompanied Ravi to Mysore when he went for a *Rotary* meeting. The day coincided with the auspicious day of *Vaikunta Ekadashi*. We set out early and stopped at the serene *Srinivasa Temple* in Karighatta. Despite the festival, we enjoyed a peaceful *darshana* of Lord Srinivasa and savored hot *uppittu prasadam*. We reached Mysore in time for Ravi's meeting, which concluded by noon. While Ravi was busy with his meeting, I visited the *Parakala Mutt* near *Jagan-mohan Palace*. There were very few visitors and so I spent a lot of peaceful time all by myself, going around the *Mutt*. The main hall is adorned with beautiful ceilings and grand chandeliers, giving the look of a mini palace.

I spent some time standing in front of the divine Lakshmi Hayagriva *sannidhi*. I also went around the temple to see the various *brindavanam*s of the departed seers, which are built at the rear of the *Mutt*.

I had just finished reading *History of Parakala Mutt*, a charming coffee table book written by our good friend Dr. Sudesh Kumar. The manner in which he has captured minute details helped me in appreciating the *Mutt* so much more!

❊

Visiting Hedatale, a quaint village in Nanjanagud *taluk*, had been my long-time dream. My paternal great-uncle hailed from Hedatale, while my paternal grandfather was from Hebbalaguppe, a nearby village. Hedatale is known for the ancient *Lakshmikantaswamy Temple* and is associated with H H Sri Sri Rangapriya Swamy, a revered scholar and a beloved well-wisher of our family. Born in Hedatale, his *brindavanam* now rests beside the temple, adding to its spiritual significance.

Later that evening, we drove to Hedatale through rustic village roads, passing heaps of horse gram husks spread out by farmers. They place these husks on the roads, allowing heavy vehicles to separate the grains effortlessly. Thankfully, our car navigated the roads smoothly, and we arrived at the *Lakshmikantaswamy Temple* without much hassle.

The temple, an architectural gem from the Hoysala era, houses three deities: Lakshmikanta, Lakshmi Narasimha, and Venugopala. The three *vigraha*s stood out as uniquely distinct from those in other temples. The highlight, however, was the *murti* of Sri Andal. In normal light, her eyes appear to gaze downward. The *archaka* invited us to pray for her divine glance, then extinguished the lights and performed the Karpura *arati*. As he brought

the flame near her eyes and chanted "Narayana!" we experienced the mesmerizing '*netra-darshana*'—her eyes seemed to meet ours directly. This profound moment left an indelible mark on our hearts, an unforgettable memory for every visitor to this sacred place. I silently bowed down to the creator of this marvellous *vigraha*.

The next morning, we visited the *Venugopala Swamy Temple* at New Kannambadi, maintained impeccably by the Khoday family. Surrounded by the expansive waters of the Kaveri, the temple felt like an island. I had never seen the river so full, its serene flow enhancing the temple's tranquil ambiance. This temple is built in a vast area. There are many *vigraha*s which adorn the huge corridors inside the temple. There are several structures outside the temple. The main attraction is the stone chariot similar to the one found in Hampi. One can spend a whole day enjoying the beauty of this temple.

Visit to Belagola

Ravi and I have visited a couple of times a newly-built *Lakshmi Narasimhar and Hanuman Temple* in Belagola, in the outskirts of Mysore.

It is built under the leadership of *Acharya* Lakshminarayan (known as Sriram in close circles), spread across an expansive area. The main temple has many pillars and each pillar is adorned with artistic Narasimha idols made out of *panchaloha*. There is a huge *sahasrabhuja* Narasimha in copper and a huge *sahasrajvala* Sudarshana in brass which are attractive and unique. I could not take my eyes off these beautiful sculptures. I felt as though I was witnessing the *vishvarupa-darshana* of Maha-vishnu!

There are also several other beautifully hand-crafted sculptures of Puri Jagannath, Ananta-padmanabha, Muktinath, Badri Narayan, Bindu Madhava, Tirupati Balaji, and many others inside the temple complex.

In addition to this, there is a *Veda patashaala* where many dedicated students are learning the *Veda*s, along with their regular studies. Their food and accommodation is taken care.

Further, *nitya-yajna* is being performed for the welfare of all—this started in 2023 and they wish to do it for twelve years non-stop, on a daily basis! Lakshminarayan extensively travels around the country and selects the best possible *vedavit*s and gets them to perform the *yajna*. They stay at the serene premises for eight to ten days and perform the *yajna* with full fervour and devotion.

Such a phenomenal work has happened in a short duration, mainly due to the dedication and selfless service of Lakshminarayan and his team.

The temple's vibrant beauty and grandeur, coupled with the *nitya-yajna* we attended, demanded at least two days to fully appreciate the nuances. Several cottages have been built in the premises, so that people can come and stay for few days. To add to the beauty of this place, a canal of Kaveri water flows in and around the temple.

After a sumptuous lunch, we left Belagola and returned home, our hearts brimming with gratitude and blessings from this divine journey.

Rama Navami Celebrations

Hari introduced me to his friend Dr. Manoj Gundanna, who invited me to his home for *Rama Navami* last year.

Manoj is a scholar with remarkable expertise in temple architecture and history. He leads a traditional lifestyle and celebrates many festivals with adherence to tradition and attention to detail. His meticulous *puja* rituals and personally prepared *prasadam* reflect his deep devotion. His cozy home in V V Puram felt like a temple, with the *puja* room adorned with vintage photographs and numerous *vigraha*s, both small and large, exquisitely decorated with flowers and ornate jewelry. The drawing room featured beautifully arranged *murti*s, and I was particularly captivated by a swing cradling Lord Rama, adorned with custom-made flower garlands.

Manoj told me that the idols were uniquely decorated each day, with elaborate *puja*s performed

over ten days. He prepared a distinct dish daily as an offering to God and generously fed many people throughout the festival. His dedication, patience, selflessness, and perseverance left me in awe.

A consummate polyglot and an engaging conversationalist, Manoj can engage in hours-long discussions on diverse topics. It was also our good fortune that Manoj visited us both at Halasuru and at Malleswaram. Thanks to Hari, I had the privilege of meeting such an inspiring individual.

I got the chance to listen to Manoj's explanation of the meaning of the *Pancharatna Kriti*s of St. Tyagaraja when *Vidvan* S Shakar's students sang the *kriti*s in *Sukra Auditorium*, which is a five-minute walk from *Viraja*. He explained concepts here and there and I saw that his perception of the lyrics was unique. I could enjoy the music program better because of his exposition and felt a need to listen to more and more of his lectures.

Varamahalakshmi Puja

AT VIRAJA

It had been over eight months since we moved to *Viraja Apartments* yet I had not met many of the residents. I was waiting for an opportunity to connect with them.

It is the tradition in our family to celebrate the *Varamahalakshmi vrata* at our ancestral home in Halasuru. This time, I decided to perform it at *Viraja* so that I could invite the women of the apartments for the *arati*. We celebrated the *puja* on

August 16th, 2024, at #003, *Viraja Apartments*. Our close relatives attended the morning *puja*.

As always, my niece Archana sat with me throughout the *puja* to assist me. I prepared a few sweets at home, while Ravi arranged the food for everyone from *Srinivasa Nilayam*. After the *puja*, we all had lunch together.

The next morning, I performed the *punar-puja* and visited the womenfolk in the apartments, inviting them to join me for the *arati* that evening. Although I had not met most of them earlier, they welcomed me warmly. That evening, all the women came home, and we had delightful conversation. Some of them, despite living in the same building, had not seen each other in a long time, because everyone is often busy with work and family. They were thrilled to have this opportunity to reconnect. Some brought their children along, and a few sang songs during the *arati*. I was touched by their warm response to my invitation. They left after receiving the *tambula*. Indiramma was overjoyed to see so many people gathered together. At the end of the day, I felt happy having met all my neighbours.

Ratha Saptami

A DAY OF BLESSINGS AND REMEMBRANCE

The auspicious occasion of *Ratha Saptami*, also celebrated as '*Surya Jayanti*' was on February 4th, 2025. The day was filled with divine energy. *Prameya* had organized an online *suryanamaskara* session from 7 to 8 am, in which I participated. It left me refreshed and uplifted.

That morning, Hari came home for breakfast and casually mentioned that he would skip lunch and have an early dinner. Around noon, as I was preparing a simple lunch for Indiramma and myself, Hari surprised me by saying that his friends Vikram Phadke and Pratap Simha would be joining us for lunch. He suggested that it could be a simple meal and offered to help if needed. I assured him I could manage alone and quickly prepared a few dishes. Soon all of us sat down to have the meal together.

Vikram and Pratap relished the food and thanked me warmly for the hospitality. With a big smile on my face, I told them that I was the one who should be grateful—because it a great blessing to feed them on the sacred day of *Ratha Saptami*.

Deep in my heart, I thought of *Appa*, and my happiness doubled. February 4th marked *Appa*'s 31st death anniversary, and having Hari's friends for lunch, uninvited yet ever-welcome, felt like a divine arrangement.

This moment reminded me of a touching episode from the life of *Appa*'s favorite author, *Sri* T P Kailasam. One day, Kailasam visited the house of his dear friend RaShi (Dr. R Shivaram). Claiming that he was famished, he requested RaShi's wife to prepare a meal. She hurriedly prepared a simple meal. When she started to serve him, Kailasam astonished them by insisting that RaShi and his wife eat instead, while he served them. Confused but moved by his persistence, they complied. After the meal, Kailasam revealed with heartfelt gratitude that it was his mother's death anniversary, and he could not have honoured her memory in a more meaningful way than by feeding two *brahmana*s!

On *Ratha Saptami*, I felt a similar sense of purpose and gratitude, as the unexpected opportunity of service mirrored Kailasam's act of devotion, making the day unforgettable.

Vishwavasu Samvatsara

A POETIC LEGACY

From a young age, *Amma* poured her heart into poetry, writing in multiple languages, with a special fondness for Kannada. In 2011, when she turned eighty, Prasad and I published an anthology of her poems titled *Expressions* – a testament to her lifelong passion for words.

My cousin Mala, who could understand but not read Kannada, often urged me to recite *Amma*'s Kannada poems to her. Busy with daily life, I kept postponing it. One day, I finally sat down to read them aloud to Mala. To my delight, I stumbled upon a poem that was titled *Vishwavasu Samvatsara*, written by *Amma* in 1965. It had even been published in a local newspaper of Mysore at the time.

As I read, I was captivated by the poem's beauty, brimming with emotion and timeless relevance,

even after six decades. Coincidentally, this year marks the return of *Vishwavasu Samvatsara*, prompting me to share the poem with close family and friends via *WhatsApp*. To my surprise, it resonated deeply with them. Many enjoyed it and even requested more of *Amma*'s Kannada poems to be shared with them. Thanks to Mala's gentle nudge, *Amma*'s poetry reached new hearts.

Though it is eight years since *Amma*'s demise, her poetry keeps her spirit alive. I feel immense pride in her legacy, as her words continue to touch lives and evokes cherished memories!

❁

This year, living at *Viraja* with Indiramma, I was contemplating on what to cook for *Chitra Vishu*. With just the two of us, I was not keen on any elaborate preparations. I had just finished my morning prayers when the doorbell rang. To my delight, my dear friend and former colleague, Renu, stood at the door with her husband, Prem. She carried steaming containers of *payasam* and *avial*, along with *panchamritam*.

Renu insisted that Indiramma taste the *payasam* first, fresh from her kitchen. I was deeply touched

by her gesture. It was a busy day for her—cleaning, cooking for her family, and decorating for the *Vishu puja*—yet she prioritized bringing these treats to us before heading home for her own celebration.

Their unexpected visit turned our day into a joyous feast, with no effort on my part. It was a *Vishu* filled with warmth, friendship, and delicious surprises!

———

Narasimha Jayanti Celebrations

On the fourth of May, Vasu *mama* informed me about a grand celebration and *homam* at the 11th Cross *Venugopalaswamy Temple* for *Narasimha Jayanti*. This coincided with Prasad's 70th birthday according to the Indian calendar. It had been a while since my last visit to the temple, so I decided to attend.

Vasu *mama* and I planned to join the morning *homam*. We drove to the temple, but with no parking place available, I dropped him off and returned home. Later, Mythily *mami* mentioned her wish to visit the temple in the evening, so I decided to take her. Despite concerns about parking, we drove there together. To our delight, we found a parking spot right next to the entrance—someone must have just left, giving room for us to park! So we parked the car and entered the temple without any hassle.

The main hall was crowded, but the *sanctum sanctorum* was surprisingly empty. We had a clear and peaceful *darshana* of all the deities and performed *archane* comfortably. The *puja* and *arati* for Lord Narasimha were magnificent, with stunning decorations that felt otherworldly.

As we strolled through the temple, we nearly sat on a bench reserved for keeping the *prasadam*. Just then, the distribution began, and by default, we were among the first to receive the *prasadam*, allowing us to leave early and avoid the crowd.

I had hoped for a brief glimpse of Lord Narasimha, but the visit turned into a serene two-hour-experience. I returned home deeply grateful for the unexpected blessings of the day.

Tyagaraja Aradhana

A MUSICAL GATHERING

Every year, our extended family gathers at *Srinivasa Nilayam*, Halasuru, to celebrate *Tyagaraja Aradhana*. Unfortunately, in 2023, health issues prevented us from holding the event. Later that year, my good friend and fellow singer from the *Bangalore Youth Choir* (BYC) *Smt*. Kanakavalli, reached out to me with exciting news. She planned to host a *Tyagaraja Aradhana* at her residence in January 2024 and invited me to join, asking if I could bring singers to sing the *Pancharatna Kriti*s. The BYC, founded by *Vidushi Smt*. Kaveri Sridhar, a music teacher of *Kendriya Vidyalaya*, has been a cherished part of our musical journey.

As the event approached, Kanaka called me, disheartened. Several singers who had initially committed were unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances, and she considered cancelling the

event. Knowing how meticulously she had planned everything with great anticipation and devotion, I encouraged her to proceed, assuring her that even a small gathering would suffice. I was optimistic that more singers would join closer to the date.

To help Kanaka, I reached out to my friend Padmarekha, who eagerly agreed to attend for two reasons: her love for singing and her joy in meeting me. Ramaa rallied relatives and friends to ensure a good turnout. Their support gave Kanaka the confidence to move forward.

On the day of the event, Kanaka and her family had beautifully decorated their home, adorning pictures of deities and Saint Tyagaraja with care, transforming the hall into a veritable *puja* space. The hall was fully packed. After the initial *puja* and *arati*, we collectively sang the *Pancharatna Kriti*s, with some singers presenting solo pieces as well. The event was a resounding success, filled with joy and harmony.

Padmarekha, a former BYC member herself, was thrilled to reconnect with Kanaka after many years. We all expressed our gratitude to Kanaka for hosting such a heartfelt event. The day concluded with a delicious lunch, thoughtfully arranged by Kanaka's family, leaving everyone fulfilled.

Satyanarayana Puja

My dear friend and junior colleague, Bhuvaneshwari, invited me to a *Satyanarayana Puja* at her daughter Archana's home, located near *Cluny Convent*, just a kilometre from our home. Archana had been inviting me to her home ever since she purchased it three years earlier, but I hadn't been able to visit until then. When I learned about the *puja*, I made it a point to attend.

As I could not find an auto-rickshaw, my cousin Vidya kindly dropped me off at Archana's house, and I arrived just in time for the *arati*. Archana and her family welcomed me warmly, their hospitality truly touching.

The house was decorated aesthetically with exquisite artifacts. Various *vigraha*s were arranged beautifully giving importance to small details and the elaborate set-up enhanced the ambiance. The *puja* was conducted with deep devotion, radiating positive energy all throughout the place.

A well-designed spiral staircase led to the first-floor bedrooms, sports room, and terrace featuring a lovely garden with exotic plants. The surrounding trees provided ample shade and greenery, creating the feeling of being nestled in a forest.

After the *puja*, I enjoyed a delectable lunch with my former colleagues, Shobha and Saritha Kumari, reminiscing about old times. I also had the privilege of meeting Bhuvaneshwari's mother, who is in her mid-90s, and spent some time with her.

Before leaving, I was given the Satyanarayana *prasadam* to take home, a sweet reminder of the blessed occasion.

The Rajakumaris of Mysore

A MEETING WITH ROYALTY

In September 2023, the *Innerwheel Club of Bangalore Koramangala*, along with other Innerwheel clubs, organized an event at the *Bangalore Club*. The highlight was a documentary screening—it was a short film by Maya Chandra on the Dasara celebrations at Mysore Palace, hosted by the Wodeyar family. The chief guests were the daughters of H H Jayachamaraja Wodeyar, *Rajakumari* Kamakshi Devi *Avaru* and *Rajakumari* Indrakshi Devi *Avaru* from the royal Wodeyar family.

As I entered the hall and joined my friends, I learned that *Rajakumari* Kamakshi Devi *Avaru* had already arrived. I spotted her in the front row, chatting with our friend Sandhya Iyengar.

Although I had never met her before, I had seen her father as well as her brother, *Yuvaraja* Srikantadatta Wodeyar, during Dasara at Mysore Palace when he was crowned the *Yuvaraja* in late 1960s.

Excited to see her, I casually mentioned to my friend Rukmini that my father used to give private tuitions to the *Yuvaraja*. Rukmini immediately ushered me to the front row to greet the *Rajakumari*. After greeting her, I told her that *Appa* had taught her brother during his high school years. To my surprise, *Rajakumari* Kamakshi Devi *Avaru* beamed with joy and asked for *Appa*'s name. When I said, "S Rangaswamy," she exclaimed with joy, revealing that she too had been his student, learning mathematics and science from him.

Moments later, when her sister, *Rajakumari* Indrakshi Devi *Avaru* arrived, she introduced me, saying, "She is our high school teacher Rangaswamy's daughter!" I was thrilled to hear my father's name and amazed that they remembered him even after so many decades. A deep sense of pride for *Appa* filled my heart.

After the documentary screening, the *Rajakumari*s addressed the gathering, engaging warmly with the audience and patiently answering their questions. Dressed in simple yet elegant saris, they mingled effortlessly with everyone. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that, despite their royal lineage, they were raised with very strong values and taught to interact with commoners humbly, without any pomp or grandeur.

Meeting the *Rajakumari*s left us all elated and we were all inspired by their grace and humility.

After returning home, I called my eldest cousin Kanna (Koti Srinivas), and told him about my meeting. Kanna expressed his happiness and told me, "I am well aware that *Anna* [i.e. my father] had taught the *Rajakumari*s and the *Yuvaraja*, because those days I used to live in Mysore with your parents and our grandparents. Your father was an excellent teacher. It is quite obvious that the *Maharaja* selected the best possible teachers of Mysore to teach his children!"

Appa was never one to speak about himself or his past. He never told us that he taught the *Rajakumari*s. Perhaps it was a lesson that he had learnt from the Wodeyars of the royal family!

Paul Harris Fellow

MY JOURNEY WITH ROTARY

I BECAME PART of the Rotary family in 1988 when Ravi joined the *Rotary Club of Bangalore Koramangala* (RCBK) as a Rotarian. In 2000–1, when Ravi was President of RCBK, he established the *Inner wheel Club of Bangalore Koramangala* (IWCBK), comprising the wives of Rotarians. I was happy to be a charter member and later served as the President of IWCBK in 2004–5.

During the pandemic, physical meetings were halted. Even before that, Ravi's attendance at RCBK meetings had become irregular. However, his passion for community service, particularly eye-care initiatives under *Avoidable Blindness* projects, remained unwavering for over twenty years. Inspired by this commitment, Ravi, along with ophthalmologists, service providers, and others, established *Rotary Bangalore 2020*, a Satellite Club

under the parent *Rotary Club of Bangalore* (RCB), the city's oldest club.

In 2022, I joined the *Rotary Bangalore 2020* as a Rotarian. Upon Ravi's suggestion, I contributed US$1,000 to become a Paul Harris Fellow (PHF). In November 2023, Rtn. Nalini Nanjundaiah, the then President of RCB and her team warmly welcomed me to RCB. I was honoured with the PHF pin with a certificate. Receiving these filled me with joy and pride, knowing my contribution would support *Rotary*'s global efforts to help those in need. I reverently value the PHF pin.

Two years later, I attended *Abhigyan*, an annual cultural event hosted by IWCBK at the same venue. The theme, *Navarasa*, was brought to life through our members' dance performances, each depicting a different emotion. The event featured a quiz competition and a play. The affection from my Inner-wheel sisters were overwhelming, and they expressed immense gratitude for my presence. Deeply touched, I stayed through the quiz before quietly excusing myself to head home, carrying with me the joy of shared bond.

Special Birthdays

In October 2024, Ramaa's mother-in-law Rukmini *mami*, entered her 100th year. A devoted reader of the *Ramayana*, *mami* completed the *parayana* of *Pattabhisheka sarga* on her birthday.

To celebrate this milestone, Ramaa and Gopi organized a get-together, inviting all of us. While Hari and Ram stayed back with Indiramma, Ravi and I attended the morning *puja* to wish *mami* and seek her blessings.

Always delighted to meet people, *mami* welcomed us cheerfully and invited me to her room. She inquired about my health with affection and asked me to sing a song while Ramaa and her sisters-in-law busied themselves in the kitchen preparing lunch. I sang *Bhavayami Raghuramam*, a *ragamalika* composed by Swati Tirunal Maharaja, which brought her immense joy. Singing for her gave me great satisfaction. After having the

prasadam, we returned home. Later, Hari and Ram also visited *mami*, took her blessings, savored lunch, and spent quality time with relatives.

❊

In November 2024, our dear friend Rtn. Rupa Venkat's father also entered his 100th year. Rupa and Rtn. Dr. Venkat organized a *homam* in a hall in Malleswaram to mark the occasion. Ravi and I were thrilled to meet such a remarkable gentleman, who actively participated in the *homam* and sat through the entire ritual with grace. Afterward, we went to the stage to seek his blessings. We also met Venkat's 90-year-old father, an avid writer of books in English and Tamil. Both gentlemen, passionate travellers, had recently visited Cambodia to see *Angkor Wat*! Their zest for life made me reflect that age is just a number. A disciplined life and a calm mind, I realized, can keep one mentally and physically vibrant.

❊

In January 2025, my dear friend Rangamani's husband, *Sri* Narasimhan, celebrated his 90th birthday. Rangamani and a group of elderly ladies, all older than me, became close friends when we lived

in *Rangamala* near New BEL Road a decade ago. I used to refer to them as my 'park friends.'

I learnt that Rangamani had been hospitalized a few times recently and so I was eager to meet her. Just then, coincidentally, her daughter-in-law Ranjani invited me to Narasimhan's 90th birthday celebration, held at their home, and welcomed me to visit at my convenience.

I went in the afternoon, met Rangamani and her husband, and sought their blessings. It was a joy to reconnect with many of my 'park friends' after ten years. But one of my friends, Manjula, was not to be seen. I thought that I would miss her. But as I waited for my cab that was to take me home, a car approached me from the opposite direction and stopped in front of me. To my utter delight, it was Manjula! My cab driver patiently waited as we greeted each other warmly and caught up briefly. I was also delighted to see my good friend M A Mythily there. Both of us are homebound owing to health reasons and it was so nice to meet her in person after a long time.

❋

In March, we celebrated Indiramma's 98th birthday at *Viraja*, with her great-great-grandson, *Chi.* Varada Simha, as the chief guest. In addition to Varada, the gathering included her great-grand daughter Mahathi, grandchildren, and children, along with members of the *Om Shanti* family (represented by Seshu *anna*, Balaji, and Vanitha), the Kanakamma family (represented by Jayashree *Akka*, Aravind, and Kausalya), and the Vasu *mama* family (represented by *mama*, *mami*, and Vidya).

Three of the family members—Indiramma, Vasantha *akka*, and Seshu *anna*—celebrate their birthdays in March, and so Ramaa arranged for an eggless cake inscribed with all three names. We gathered in the drawing room, where the trio cut the cake as everyone sang, "Happy Birthday."

It was a rare occasion that brought together five generations under one roof.

Five Generations

A BABY BOY was born on 6th December, 2024, in Amsterdam. This baby—named Sri Varada Simha Bharadwaj—happens to be Indiramma's daughter's daughter's daughter's son. That is Vasantha *akka*'s great-grandson / Revati's grandson / Mahati's son. Varada Simha is the seventh generation to be welcomed at our ancestral home, *Srinivasa Nilayam* in Halasuru, and the first baby born in the family since Mahati, his mother, twenty-six years earlier. Indiramma has six grandchildren but so far only one great-grandchild (Mahati). No doubt, Varada, the fifth generation baby, has become the apple of our eyes.

I made comforters and a sleeping bag for Varada using soft old cotton saris along with bonnets and sweaters in various sizes. When Mahati shared how useful they were, my happiness knew no bounds. Mahati and her husband Abhishek celebrated Varada's arrival with traditional *samskaara*s

—*jatakarma*, *namakarana*, cradle ceremony, *anna-praashana*—attended by many relatives. The events culminated in a delicious lunches.

I also attended Varada's ear-piercing ceremony. Though he cried at first, the little one soon smiled as I sang *bhajan*s, gently holding his tiny fingers and moving his palms to the rhythm.

We will miss him dearly when he returns to Amsterdam, but we are already looking forward to celebrating his first birthday at *Srinivasa Nilayam*.

Our 45th Wedding Anniversary

On the second of May, our forty-fifth wedding anniversary, was made special by Ravi's friend Rtn. Sampath, who arranged a memorable visit to many temples.

Early that morning, Sampath and his friend Vijaykumar picked us up from home. Our first stop was Bindiganavile, a temple town in Mandya district, where we visited the ancient temple dedicated to Chennakeshava and Soumyanayaki. The temple's striking black sandalwood Garuda and Hanuman *vigraha*s were a highlight. The day coincided with *Ramanuja Jayanti* and *Shankara Jayanti*, allowing us to witness a sacred *abhishekam* for Ramanujar and a grand *homam* conducted by Adi Shankara's devotees at the *Brahmana Sabha*.

Next, we travelled about twenty kilometers to Nagamangala to visit the famous *Saumyakeshava-swamy Temple*, built in the Hoysala style during

the Vijayanagara period. The temple houses exquisite *vigraha*s of Venugopala with Rukmini and Satyabhama on one side, Lakshmi Narasimha on the other, and a revered *saligrama* Nagadeva. Intricate carvings adorn the temple's walls and ceilings, showcasing its architectural splendour.

As we went around the corridor of the temple, in one corner, we saw a small, charming Anjaneya *murti*. This Anjaneya has a broad smiling face, happily exhibiting all his teeth! One certainly feels like reciprocating the broad smile, looking at this idol. There was hardly any light and the few steps leading to the small shrine were also rugged and not easy to climb but it was totally worth taking the trouble.

I made several jasmine flower garlands, which I offered at all the temples we visited. After partaking the *prasadam* for lunch at Nagamangala, we returned home by evening, filled with gratitude to Sampath and Vijaykumar for making our anniversary truly unforgettable.

50th Wedding Anniversary

On the fourth of June, 1975, Vasu *mama* and Mythili *mami* tied the knot at *Viraja*, a spacious house with a large compound, marking the beginning of their beautiful journey together.

This year, on June 4th, Vidya and Srikanth, hosted a grand lunch buffet for their parents' 50th wedding anniversary. They invited their parents' '*Nightingales*' friends. Hari and I joined the festivities and relished the delicious spread. Friends from *Nightingales Elders Enrichment Centre* honoured Vasu *mama* and *mami* with garlands and a basket of fruits. A friend recited aloud a heartfelt poem for all to enjoy, adding a touching moment.

After lunch, Ravi and I visited Vasu *mama* and *mami* to extend our wishes. Ravi presented Vasu *mama* with a traditional Mysore *peta* and gifted both of them beaded garlands and a shawl. I wore the same sari that Didima had gifted me fifty years ago for their wedding—*mami* instantly recognized

it! Vidya and Srikanth were astonished and amused that I had preserved the sari all these years.

Choosing a gift for such a milestone was a challenge; Vasu *mama* and *mami* already have everything they need. To avoid giving something repetitive or burdensome, I decided on a unique idea: a collection of 50 everyday essentials. With Ravi's help, I curated a bag filled with 50 items. They were surprised and delighted. That evening, *mami* called to express their gratitude for the thoughtful gifts, noting how practical and useful each item was.

I was overjoyed that my idea resonated so well with them, making their golden jubilee even more memorable.

Nonegenarian Siblings

After my retirement, I had not had the chance to meet Rukmini Madam, my first Principal at MLA PU College. This January, I decided to visit her and invited some former colleagues to join me. They agreed enthusiastically, and we planned the visit after *Sankranti*.

Rukmini Madam's niece, *Smt*. Kavita, who is the Vice President of MLA Institutions, informed us that evening would be best time to meet madam. Five of us—Latha Hegde, Triveni Murthy, Rashmi Seshamurthy, Chandrakala, and I—visited madam. We found her in her room, solving a *Sudoku* puzzle. She welcomed us warmly, expressing genuine joy at seeing us.

We asked if she remembered us. "How can I forget you all?" she replied, laughing heartily.

At 95, Madam's memory remains sharp. She offered us *ellu-bella* and blessed us.

A few months later, Triveni and I visited her again, along with our former colleague Sridevi. The reunion brought back fond memories of visiting Madam's home for *Ganesha Puja* as well as *Guru Vandana*. We reminisced about her stunning free-hand *Rangoli*—intricate designs with vibrant colours—and her extraordinary skills in knitting. Her choice of patterns and colours for sweaters was remarkable. I mentioned about the lovely sweater

she knitted for my son Hari when he was a baby, and she smiled, saying that she remembered. We enjoyed coffee together and were about to leave.

Just then, we came to know that Madam's brother, *Sri* K Narahari, 92, was in the front room. A former Member of the *Legislative Council* representing the teachers' constituency of Bangalore, he had visited MLA several times. He greeted us with great enthusiasm and gifted us copies of his recently published book, detailing his illustrious career.

I mentioned, "Sir, you will be pleased to know that the final three volumes of the English translation of D V Gundappa's *Art Gallery of Memories* [*Jnapaka-chitra-shaale* in Kannada] were released recently at the *Gokhale Institute*. I remembered that you were the Chief Guest at the event when the first three volumes were released in 2019."

To my surprise, he vividly remembered the event. I casually mentioned that my son was the Chief Editor of the series. Remarkably, Narahari sir remembered meeting Hari six years earlier. He asked for my son's full name. When I said, "Hari Ravikumar," he exclaimed, "Oh, yes! He studied at BMS College, right? I studied there too and later

worked as a Professor of Mechanical Engineering. Hari and his friends are doing excellent work under the guidance of *Shatavadhani* R Ganeshji and I am proud of them." I was astonished at his memory, considering the countless people he must have met all through his life.

He expressed his desire to meet Hari and so one morning, I took him to meet Narahari sir. Despite being unwell, he welcomed us warmly and spent precious time with us. We felt truly blessed to meet such a kind soul, always ready to help those in need.

Meeting my Teachers

After retiring from service, I joined my school and college *WhatsApp* groups, rekindling a desire to reconnect with my former classmates and also my teachers. I began inquiring about my high school mathematics teacher, *Smt*. Sundaramma. I called many classmates but no one knew her whereabouts. We remembered she lived in Rajajinagar, but she had since relocated, and her new address was a mystery.

One day, my classmate spotted her on a TV channel and traced her to an old-age home in Rajarajeswari Nagar. We contacted the manager, who suggested that evenings were the best time to visit. In December 2022, my friends planned an evening trip to see her.

I was recovering from surgery and hesitant about the long journey. But Hari encouraged me not to miss this opportunity and offered to take me. He suggested we arrive a little later, meet our

teacher briefly, and return early. When we reached the old-age home, my friends were gathered under a tree in an open area, and I joined them.

We eagerly awaited Sundaramma Teacher, wondering if she would recognize us. She arrived slowly, using a walker, and sat among us. Despite her poor eyesight, she began identifying each one of us, thrilled to reconnect. We reminisced about her classes, sharing how her teaching made math feel approachable. I took a liking for math because of her teaching.

She shared stories of her life, chatted joyfully and we captured the moments with some photos. That day fulfilled a long-cherished wish.

Recently, I learned her eyesight has improved, and she has moved back to her home in Rajajinagar.

❄

It turns out that *Smt*. Ratnamma, who was my science teacher in high school, is the mother of Sandeep Balakrishna, Hari's friend. Whenever Hari visited Sandeep, he conveyed my regards to her, and she would inquire about me. I could not visit her because I had to take care of Indiramma and also because her house was far away.

Once on a phonecall with her, when I told her about my situation, she immediately promised to visit me during one of her monthly visits to Malleswaram to meet one of her friends. Being a former resident of Malleswaram, she makes periodic trips to her friend's place because they are unable to travel to her home.

True to her word, in June 2024, she came to our home. Her kindness overwhelmed me.

We spoke like friends, reminiscing about our batch and the teachers who shaped us. She shared how she spends her days teaching neighbourhood children games, reading, writing, drawing, and

storytelling, even conducting quizzes. The enthusiasm she has at her age is inspiring. Her independence and positivity make her a role model for all senior citizens.

❋

After moving to *Viraja*, I longed to meet Prof. Lalita Murthy, who taught me English at MES College. My classmate, J. Viswanath, a Physics Professor at the college, helped me get her contact number. I messaged her, introducing myself and requesting for an appointment, and she promptly invited me to her home the next evening, sharing her address.

Excited to meet her after fifty long years, I arrived at her apartment. She greeted me warmly with a hug in the corridor, looking remarkably unchanged. I told her how much I loved her classes, especially her lessons on William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and never missed even a single class. I mentioned to her that she had a knack of controlling the classes well and nobody dared to make noise when she was teaching.

She laughed, admitting that she would pretend to be strict to manage the class but was actually quite timid. She shared amusing stories about her time as Principal, dealing with irregular students who later became very successful in their careers and now have become her good friends!

I had planned to spend an hour together, but time slipped away as we relived old memories. I

suddenly remembered that it was time for me to have my medicines. I excused myself and came home, assuring that I would meet her again.

By the time I reached home, she had texted me, expressing joy at our reunion, calling me a 'friend,' and reminding me to take my medicine! Her thoughtfulness touched me deeply.

Some days later, I felt an urge to revisit a few of Shakespeare's plays, inspired by our meeting. When I mentioned this to Hari, he gifted me a beautifully bound book of Shakespeare's plays the next day. I plan to read them as stories first, hoping to delve into the plays later.

❊

After completing my MSc. in 1978, I hardly got to meet my Professors Vaman Sir and Jahnavi Madam. Somehow I managed to get their contact number and called them one evening. I was excited to know that they remembered me. Jahnavi Madam started enquiring about all our classmates. I was quite surprised at her memory and asked her how she was able to remember all our names, including surnames! She then said that we were her first batch students and also the best! I was quite overwhelmed. During our conversation, I learnt that she retired from service after I had!

One of my classmates, Alladi Subramanyam has organized a get-together of some of our batchmates along with our Professors Vaman, Jahnavi, and Manjunath even as this book goes to press. I am eagerly looking forward to meeting everyone after a very long gap.

Flying Visits

I often receive fleeting visits from dear friends and family at our home in *Viraja*. Though these moments are brief, I deeply appreciate the effort they make to stop by, even when time is short. These quick visits, filled with affection, bring me immense joy.

Last year, *Smt*. Bhama, the *sambandhi* of Prasad and Malathi, visited us on her way to the airport, accompanied by her cousin Sriram. Bhama, who lives in the US and visits India annually, usually spends her time in Chennai with her parents and other relatives. Despite her tight schedule, she made time for a short visit. Her friendly and charming nature made it feel as though we had known each other for years. It was a delight to meet her, though we are yet to meet her daughter, Shruti—i.e., Arun's wife.

One evening, our family friend cum relative Jayaraman (Jai) visited with his wife Anuradha

(Anu) and sister Usha. I had met Usha and her family in Kolkata few years ago. She and her son Anirudh had taken me to *Victoria Memorial* and other places. We now cherished those moments. It was very nice to meet up with her again. We chatted for a while and soon they had to leave.

Anu and Jai bought a flat last year and kept inviting me since then. I got an opportunity to make a quick visit along with Deepta, when she came here for a brief visit. Anu and Jai live on the 20th floor and the view from the balcony was quite breathtaking. Anu has aesthetically done up her home and I particularly liked the lightings and her artefacts. I felt happy visiting their new home and felt happier when they said that their wish was fulfilled.

This year, on my birthday, cousins Prabha and Babu called to wish me and expressed their eagerness to visit me. I was thrilled and prepared some sweets to share with them. Prabha gifted me a beautiful shawl, thoughtfully chosen by Babu during their recent trip to Rajasthan. Their visit was brief due to Babu's health concerns, but I was deeply touched by their effort to travel from Hebbal through heavy weekend traffic to see me.

Another delightful surprise came that day.

Usha, my good friend and classmate from school, called to wish me and mentioned she might stop by that evening. When the doorbell rang, to my astonishment, it was not Usha but her elder sister, Viji, standing at the door! Viji, my senior in music class whom I have always admired, lives in Pheonix, AZ and visits Bangalore occasionally. That day, Usha had invited Viji for lunch and had casually mentioned her that it was my birthday; Viji decided to drop by. She brought a thoughtful gift, spent a few moments with us, and left for another engagement. Her unexpected visit left me pleasantly surprised.

My dear friend and former colleague Sridevi, who lives in San Diego, CA, never fails to visit me during her annual trips to Bangalore. Despite her busy schedules, filled with family gatherings and travels across India, she always makes time to visit me.

This year, we managed to spend some quality time together and had lunch with our friend and colleague Triveni, her husband Raghumurthy, and Sridevi's brother Prasad. Sridevi's consistent effort to include me in her visits makes me feel like part of her family.

Even after retirement, I am in touch with some of my colleagues in the Department of Statistics, though they are younger than me. Recently, my friends Bhuvaneswari, Kanakavalli, and Sumangala Kalmat visited me. All of them had retired from service some years ago. We fondly remembered our meetings during question paper setting and the valuation camps. We had worked together for more than three decades. It was nice to meet them after a long gap.

Vasantha *akka*'s friend Geeta is a family friend. Her mother was an enterprising lady whom I used to meet often in 1980s. Geeta is also very creative and does a lot of hand crafts. She lives in Chennai and came to Bangalore to attend a family function close to our house. So Ramaa brought Geeta and her husband to see Indiramma.

Knowing Geeta's keen interest in handicrafts, I showed some of my hand work. She was happy to see all of them. I enthusiastically showed what all I had made in the past years. For a moment I felt as if I was showing off but once I realised Geeta was genuinely appreciating and expressing happiness, I felt convinced! It gives a good feeling if ones work is sincerely appreciated.

My former colleague Annapurni would often call me to enquire about my health. She normally doesn't step out alone. But one fine day, she came all by herself to see me. I hadn't met her since my retirement and it was great catching up with her. That is when I expressed my wish to meet her brother Raj Vedam during his next visit to the city. Within a few months, we got a chance to meet him at Annapurni's home!

For quite some time, I hadn't met my former colleagues Latha Hegde and Triveni Murthy—my immediate predecessors as Principal of MLA PU College. When they came to know that I have shifted to *Viraja*, they came home to visit me. I was humbled by their affection. We talked happily about our long tenure together and remembered the good old days. We felt several years younger by just spending a few minutes together!

My cousin Deepta hardly visits Bangalore; she largely shuttles between Mumbai and Chennai. But recently, she made a flying visit to the city along with her colleague Balu (Balachandran) to attend a few meetings. I was meeting Balu for the first time although I have heard a great deal about him for over twenty years. I was impressed by his simplicity.

Celebrating
AMI

Even though it is only for a short while, it is always such a pleasure to spend time with Deepta, who is such a bundle of positivity.

My dear friend Malini—my M.Sc. classmate—and her husband, Dr. Keshavaprasad, live in California and frequently visit Bangalore. They have a house in Jayanagar and stay there during their visits to Bangalore. Recently, Malini made a quick visit after meeting her relatives in Malleswaram, close to *Viraja*. She barely had time to sit, but she stopped by, greeted Indiramma, enjoyed a bite of the sweets I offered, took a quick selfie, and promised to return for a longer visit. Though her stay lasted only a few minutes, her affection warmed my heart. It's no surprise that our classmates at *Central College* fondly called us 'Hema-Malini' for our close bond.

Common relatives and friends who come to visit Vasu *mama*, often visit me also. So, I get to meet quite a few people, because I am staying here.

Sometime last year, Vaidehi shitti's daughter Hemu came home with her grown up son Rohan. I don't remember to have seen Rohan at all. I felt very happy seeing him. They live in the Bay area and had come here for just few days.

During our brief interaction, Hemu fondly remembered how she used to play with little Hari, decades ago. It was nice catching up with Hemu after a long time.

Recently cousin Mukund's wife Jayashree came home with her mother for a brief visit, on the way to Airport. I had visited her parents in Mumbai in 2022 when I went to see Nalini *shitti* who was unwell and was taken care of by Mukund and Jayashree.

I had invited Jayashree's parents to come to Bangalore at least for a short visit. Unfortunately Jayashree's father passed away last year and she brought her mother to Bangalore to cheer her up and also meet her relatives. She visited us and so also Vasu *mama* and family. I felt happy meeting them, even though it was for a short duration.

Recently, Nanaji's friend's daughter Ulhas Simh visited me just for a minute. I was seeing her after twenty five years! She looked the same. We had visited her in Pheonix, AZ in 1990 when Hari and Ram were kids. It was great seeing her.

These fleeting visits, though short, are filled with love and thoughtfulness, making them truly special to me.

Meeting Raj Vedam

Hari had been urging me to connect with my former colleague, Annapurni, a retired English lecturer, to arrange a meeting with her brother, Dr. Raj Vedam, a distinguished scholar and researcher, deeply engaged in Indic Studies. As a cofounder of the think-tank *Indian History Awareness and Research*, he is a very busy professional, frequently traveling to deliver lectures at various organizations and institutions. Having been impressed by his *YouTube* lectures on the scientific validation of Indian history, which I found insightful, I too was eager to meet him.

Annapurni had often invited me to visit her, and one day she called to inform me that her brother Rajkumar (Raj) was in town for a few days. She suggested we come over the next evening. Hari was thrilled, and we made our way to her home. Initially, we planned for a brief half-hour visit, but

the engaging conversation stretched to nearly two hours! To our delight, Dr. Raj's younger brother, Rotarian Vedam Jaishankar, a sports journalist and author of the Rahul David's biography, also joined us. I had briefly met Jaishankar at the *Rotary House of Friendship* but hadn't had the chance to interact much. This time, I enjoyed quality time with all of them, mostly as a silent observer, absorbing their fascinating discussions and diverse perspectives expressed in simple yet profound way.

We thanked them for their generous time and returned home, feeling grateful for Annapurni's warm hospitality.

Doctor Couple

In January 2024, after relocating to *Viraja*, I learned that my dear friend and former colleague, Renu Shukla, a PhD in Hindi and also a fashion technologist, was quite unwell. Concerned, I called to check on her, and she told me that she was under heavy medication. She promised to reach out when she felt better, so that I could visit her.

A few weeks later, I visited Renu and was struck by her significant weight loss. Despite her condition, she remained cheerful, though her movements and diet were restricted. Her husband, Dr. Anil Kumar Shukla, a radiologist and family friend, welcomed me, inquired about my health, and offered his assistance. He even recommended a nearby facility for PET scans, sharing the contact of a trusted doctor friend.

I wished Renu a speedy recovery and invited her to visit my home, as we lived close by. Before

leaving, Renu asked me to sing for her. I shared some *bhajan*s and old Hindi film songs, which she enjoyed immensely. To my delight, Renu also requested a few songs for her one-year-old granddaughter, Rivaanya. I recorded children's songs and *bhajan*s and sent them to her, which brought me great joy.

One evening, Renu's daughters, Aditi and Aakanksha, brought little Rivaanya to my place. The toddler danced gleefully as I sang, her joyful movements lighting up the house. It was fun to watch the child.

Recently, Renu called to share that she was ready to visit me. Thrilled, I asked Ravi and Hari

to join me. As Renu and Dr. Shukla arrived at our flat, I was amazed to see Renu walking with ease. Her creative spirit shone through as she had begun knitting sweaters and frocks for little Rivaanya, a sign of her improving health. We spent the evening chatting happily, reminiscing and laughing together.

Before leaving, Renu smiled and said, "We're both sailing in the same boat. Our health has improved thanks to the love and support of our families." Her words resonated deeply, a testament to the power of care and connection.

Teen Deviyaan

I HAVE KNOWN Rtn. Jayaraman and his wife, Ann. Nirmala, for nearly two decades. Back then, their daughter Anusha was just a young girl. Over the years, I often expressed my desire to meet Anusha, but circumstances never aligned.

Anusha is now married and has a charming teenage daughter, Aanika, and ever since Aanika's birth, I've been eager to meet her, too. Each time I met Nirmala, I would inquire about Aanika's well-being. One morning, Nirmala called to share that she was bringing both Anusha and Aanika to my place for a brief ten-minute visit.

I was delighted by the surprise. Anusha dropped Nirmala and Aanika at the gate and went to park the car, circling *Viraja* multiple times before finding a spot. Those ten minutes were spent just on finding a place to park their car!

Seeing the three generations together filled me with joy. Anusha has grown into a smart and

capable woman, clearly raising Aanika with great care. Aanika, a talented singer, sang an English song that left me in awe of her vocal range and melody. With continued practice, she could easily shine as an opera singer. They might have stayed longer, but a call from Jayaraman reminded them of their shopping errands.

I recently read an article Aanika wrote about nature, and I was struck by the depth and eloquence of her words—remarkable for someone so young.

I was overjoyed that my long-standing wish to meet them had finally come true.

Uninvited Visitor

One day around noon, I headed to a nearby goldsmith's shop to repair some jewellery. To my disappointment, the shop was closed. The goldsmith's wife shouted from their first-floor window, "My husband has gone out, madam. Please call him and come back in the evening." I realized that I had forgotten to call him beforehand—a habit I had transgressed for some reason.

Feeling bad that I had wasted my time and energy, I turned around. I saw my friend Alamelu's parents' home. Alamelu has settled in the US but I knew that her brother's family had lived there for years. I hadn't heard from Alamelu or her siblings in a long time, so I decided to take a chance and enter, hoping to reconnect if someone answered the door.

Hesitantly, I rang the bell. Alamelu's brother opened the door and before I could introduce

myself, he greeted me, saying that he remembered me. He called his wife, Sharada, who was busy serving lunch to some guests. Embarrassed to have arrived unannounced during their meal, I quickly explained my visit and prepared to leave. But then, a voice called out, "Hey, aren't you Hema? What a pleasant surprise!" It was Aruna, Alamelu's elder sister, whom I often met at public examination valuation centers. Moments later, another familiar voice chimed—Vijayalakshmi, Alamelu's eldest sister, a former colleague from my days teaching Statistics at MLA PU College. We bonded over singing at college events in the early 1980s, but I hadn't seen her since she left. She looked pretty much the same!

Sujaya, another sister whom I hadn't met before, was also there. All the sisters had recently returned from the US after visiting their children, and Sharada had invited them for lunch. By sheer coincidence, I had stumbled upon all of Alamelu's siblings under one roof! Overjoyed, we exchanged pleasantries, reminiscing about childhood, teachers, and old times. Sharada kindly offered me lunch, but having already eaten, I accepted some savouries instead. After cherishing some nostalgic

moments, I returned home, thanking my stars for not calling the goldsmith beforehand!

A few days later, Alamelu called me, having heard about my visit from Aruna. Her familiar "Hi Hema" in her distinctive Kannada tone felt like we had picked up a conversation paused just a few days ago, despite four decades apart. Living in the US for over forty years, her accent, slang, and humour remained unchanged. She fondly recalled my father's witty nickname for her, "All Melu," because she was the tallest among all my friends—a memory I was also thinking of!

Alamelu shared her life's ups and downs over the past forty years. Her resilience and detached perspective on life is truly inspiring. We ended the call, promising to stay in touch, leaving me greatful for the coincidence that helped me to rekindle our friendship.

———

A Pleasant Surprise

One morning, I was bustling in the kitchen, preparing lunch for Hari, Chandra, and his friend Suresh Paul, who were coming over. I was halfway through my preparations when the doorbell rang. Expecting our maid, I opened the door to a delightful surprise—Anu! "Hi, Hema," she said in her signature cheerful style. I was astonished.

Anu revealed that she had kept her visit a secret and asked me not to tell anyone—she wanted to surprise everyone at the right moment. She dropped her bag in the front room, washed her hands, and peeked into the kitchen. Without missing a beat, she took over where I had left off, gracefully shooing me towards the door as she claimed the kitchen. She continued chopping tomatoes, whipping up a tangy *gojju*. Spotting some sprouts, she tossed in vegetables and a *tadka* to create a vibrant salad. She made *raita* from cucumbers,

and prepared *chutney*, *rasam*, *channa paneer*, and *sabudana payasam* with ease. I assisted minimally, handing her ingredients as needed.

Soon, the doorbell rang again. Hari, Chandra, and Suresha arrived, unaware of Anu's presence. I kept her secret. But when Chandra went to the front room to drop his bag, he spotted Anu's bag and guessed that she was here. The surprise didn't stay hidden for long—Anu emerged from the kitchen, delighting everyone. While they all exchanged greetings, I prepared *mooli paratha*s. Meanwhile, Ravi sent over *rava kesari* and a curry from Halasuru, adding to our feast.

Anu managed the entire spread with remarkable efficiency, as if she had traveled from Chennai just to cook for us! The lunch was a hit, enjoyed by all. Afterward, we played our family card game, Bukaro, with Vasu *mama* joining in. As always, Anu's team triumphed, capping off a truly memorable day!

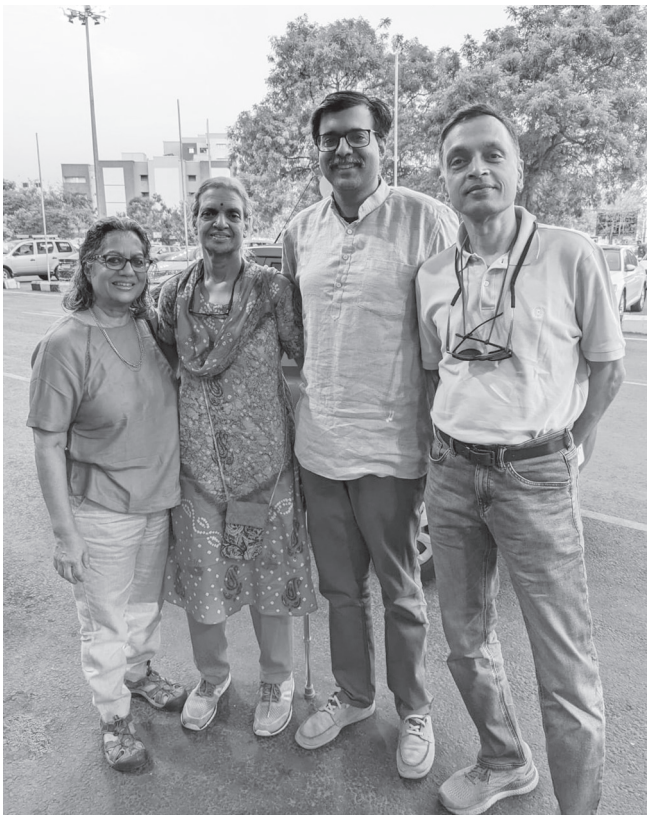
A 'Serene' Escape

For nearly a decade, Chandra invited me to his home near Coimbatore—named '*Serene Indus Valley*' —at least a hundred times. He would often describe the lush greenery and the peacocks, my favourite bird, that roamed freely there. Finally, in May 2024, I decided to visit *Serene* for two days.

Hari was already planning a trip there and had booked train tickets, so I opted for a flight. Hari kindly offered to carry my luggage, allowing me to travel light. Thanks to Deepta's remote coordination, I had a wheelchair arranged and used the *DigiYatra* app for a seamless airport experience. At Bangalore Airport, I was whisked through security in a wheelchair, bypassing the queue, and was the first to board the plane. Deepta had even secured me a front-row seat, making me feel like a VVIP! Her thoughtfulness didn't stop there—she called every fifteen minutes to ensure that I was

comfortable. The airhostess welcomed me, guiding me to my seat, and soon we landed in Coimbatore.

At the arrival gate, Anu and Chandra were waiting to pick me up. A half-hour drive took us to *Serene Indus Valley*.



Serene lived up to its name. As we came near Chandra's home, we spotted peacocks, including juveniles, strolling along the streets—a delightful sight. Balam *mami*, Chandra's mother, greeted me when I entered. Later we also met Chandra's sister, Chitra, who lives nearby.

Balam *mami* is a remarkable lady. An accomplished author, her recent book *Two Loves and Other Stories* showcases her storytelling prowess. She's also a skilled painter, a gifted singer who composes songs, and a *yoga* expert, and the list goes on—yet remains incredibly humble.

Anu and I explored the community, marvelling at the peacocks. To our delight, we saw one, its feathers fanned out in a dazzling 360-degree dance. I had never witnessed such a spectacle so close—it was as if the peacock danced just for us!

That evening, for the benefit of the residents—many of whom are die-hard music *rasika*s—Hari presented a lecture-demonstration on allied *raga*s in Carnatic music, explaining how the exact same notes may give rise to different flavours simply by a change in the *gamaka* and approach to the *raga*. He played some sections on the violin, earning admiration from the audience.

After dinner, we visited Chandra's friend's home for a lively *karaoke* party. We all sang, laughed, and returned home filled with joy.

The next morning, I left for Bangalore, with Anu ensuring I had a wheelchair and a smooth send-off at the airport.

Thanks to Anu and Deepta, I travelled with so much comfort and felt so pampered. I thought that I could travel anywhere all by myself if only I get such treatment and care! My short stay at *Serene* was unforgettable, filled with beauty and peace.

Notation to Songs

A MUSICAL JOURNEY

I HAVE BEEN attending Carnatic music classes intermittently for several decades. While I enjoy singing, I hardly venture into writing notations. A few years ago. I had learnt a few *devaranama*s in well-known *raga*s from my *guru Vidushi* B G Singaramma. I had requested her to teach me the *sahiya*s so that I could try and write the notations myself. After writing the notations, I cross verified with her and made the necessary changes.

My cousins Deepta and Anu (and Chandra), who share a deep passion for Carnatic music, often ask me to teach them specific songs. If I know the songs, I promptly send them a recording. But when they a requested song I was unfamiliar with, I decided to try and write notations from the song recordings. I listened to the song repeatedly to identify its *raga* and phrases. Then, I sang the

scale, followed by each phrase in my pitch, carefully transcribing the notations. To ensure accuracy, I cross-checked by playing the notes on *Amma*'s *veena*—a truly invaluable teacher.

Over time, I successfully wrote notations for several songs. It was a time-consuming process but I found it deeply rewarding. I would record myself singing the *svara*s and phrases twice, sharing these with my cousins so they could listen once and practice along the second time.

With my recordings and notations, they were able to learn the songs properly. They expressing their gratitude was heart-warming.

Surprisingly, I also learned many new songs in the process. I'm grateful to my cousins for inspiring me to explore something unusual, enriching my musical journey in ways that I had not imagined.

Bhagavad-gita Classes

JOURNEY THROUGH A SCRIPTURE

My introduction to reciting the *Bhagavad-gita* began at MLA High School and continued even at MES College. When I became a lecturer at MLA PU College, I observed that the students were taught to recite *shloka*s from the *Gita*. Over the years, I recited all the chapters of the *Gita* a few times on my own, although I never fully grasped their meanings.

I had read the *Easy Bhagavad-Gita* written by Ambi and Hari a couple of times but had not learnt word-for-word meanings.

In March 2024, Shilpa Sharma, a close friend of Hari based in Seattle, USA, organized a three-month online *Bhagavad-gita* course that he was to teach. The classes ran from March to May, held every week day morning, accommodating evening hours for participants in the US across time zones.

Hari began with a concise introduction to the *Gita* and proceeded to recite each verse, breaking it into phrases and encouraging a volunteer to repeat after him. He provided the prose order and explained the word-for-word meaning in simple language, making it accessible even to teenagers. Hari's engaging teaching style, enriched with real-life examples, made the course captivating for all attendees, young and old. As a mother, I felt immense pride and joy watching him inspire so many.

A few months later, Shilpa organized another *Gita* course, this time led by my cousin Ambi. I attended these sessions diligently as well. Ambi's classes were vibrant, filled with anecdotes from Sanskrit, Kannada, and Tamil literature, delivered with his signature humour and followed by lively Q&A sessions. His scholarly presentations, offering diverse perspectives on complex concepts, left me in awe of his knowledge. The participants could not get enough of his insights, and once again, I felt a deep sense of pride.

At the conclusion of both courses, we expressed heartfelt gratitude to Shilpa for tirelessly organizing these sessions despite her demanding schedule. Interacting with her made me realize that truly

busy people somehow find time to do even more! Shilpa's dedication continues, as she constantly organizes *Gita* classes.

Thanks to her efforts, I am now attending another series of *Gita* classes, this time led by the erudite *Sri* Shivaswamy *gurugalu*. Inspired by his teachings, I have started practicing daily morning meditation.

He began teaching the first chapter on an *Ekadashi* day in April 2025 and suggested that we should try reciting all 700 verses of the *Gita* on that day.

Coincidentally, I was traveling to Chennai by train that afternoon, and I carried my *Gita* book with me, intending to read a few chapters. To my surprise, I completed reciting all 700 verses just before the train reached Chennai Central station! This remarkable achievement would not have been possible had I stayed at home.

On the occasion of *Guru Purnima*, Shilpa put together a short presentation by four people who had previously taught the *Gita* to their group – Shivaswami sir, Dr. Venkata Raju, Ambi [Dr. Koti Sreekrishna], and Hari. Each one spoke about a different aspect of Vyasa and the *Gita*.

Through the course of their classes, Hari and Ambi often referenced *Jivana-dharma-yoga*, a commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita* by *Sri* D V Gundappa. Intrigued, I borrowed the book from Hari and read it. After finishing the voluminous tome, I realized that I had merely scratched the surface, gaining what DVG calls *akshara parichaya* (an introduction to the words of the treatise). To truly internalize its wisdom, I understand that I must revisit it multiple times for *manana* (reflection) and *manthana* (deep contemplation), as DVG advises.

Bhajan Sessions

My old friend Srilata Rajaratnam, daughter of the renowned Kannada author and poet, late Dr. G P Rajaratnam, invited me for a *bhajan* session near our home. I was thrilled, as I had not attended a *bhajan* in decades.

On that specific Sunday evening, I arrived at *Bhoomika Hall*, wondering if I could recognize anyone. Many from the older generation I knew are no longer with us, and I have lost touch with peers from the *bhajan* group.

To my surprise, the hall was filled with youngsters. The session, accompanied by skilled musicians playing the harmonium, *tabla*, *kanjira*, and cymbals, lasted an hour. I thoroughly enjoyed singing the *bhajan*s, immersed in their uplifting melodies.

Initially, I only knew Srilata there. After the session, as I went to meet her, a charming young

lady approached me and introduced herself as Smitha, the daughter of my old friend and music classmate, Geetha. I instantly recognized her, despite not seeing her for nearly thirty-five years! Smitha, a former student of our PU College, introduced me to her two cute daughters, in whom I could see resemblance of Geetha and her mother, Ranganayaki *mami*. I fondly remembered Geetha's family, but had lost contact over time. Smitha also introduced me to Dr. G P Rajaratnam's grandson, Ravi, whom I vaguely recalled having seen him as a child.

I took Geetha's number from Smitha and called her. She was overjoyed, and we reminisced about our families and the joyful times that we had spent singing *bhajan*s after college hours.

Initially, I thought I would feel out of place, not knowing anyone there. But, thanks to the younger generation, I reconnected with my own generation, making the evening truly special.

Trisha and Rishi

A GLIMPSE INTO THEIR TALENTS

I HAVE OCCASIONALLY met Srikanth and Archana's children, Trisha and Rishi, over the years. However, after moving to *Viraja*, I had the chance to spend a lot of time with them during their recent visit to Bangalore.

One evening, Trisha brought her violin and Western music notation. She set up the staff notation on a stand and began playing. Her performance was captivating, with each song played melodiously and rhythmically. I was struck by her focus and dedication. As a serious music student, her passion is evident. Curious about her music notes, which looked complex to me, I asked Trisha to explain them.

She patiently broke down each line, revealing her impressive knowledge and skill. Beyond the violin, Trisha is a multifaceted talented girl –

engaged in writing, dance, Carnatic music, rowing, and more. Rishi, equally remarkable, is sharp, mature beyond his years, and very passionate about playing soccer.

Both siblings excel academically and in extra-curricular activities. They regularly attend *Bal Vihar* classes and have earned the admiration of their teachers and peers. I deeply admire Srikanth and Archana for nurturing their children's talents while granting them the freedom to pursue their passions.

Varun's Assignment

My nephew Varun—Vidya's son—is presently pursuing a Masters' degree in Digital Banking at the *University of Stirling* in Scotland. In March 2025, he contacted me for help with his college assignment. He needed information for an essay about an 'ethical leader' he knew personally, and to my surprise, he chose me as his subject.

Varun sent me a series of questions in a specific format, with a tight deadline for submission the next day. To accommodate this, I set aside my regular tasks for two days and focused on addressing his questions. I answered based on my recollections, and when I had doubts, I consulted Ravi, who often remembers details about my work better than I do!

After two days of effort, I sent Varun a voicemail with my responses, as per his suggestion. He used the information to complete his essay.

A few weeks later, Varun shared the exciting news that his essay had earned him first prize and the top spot in his class! I was thrilled to know that, even a decade after my retirement, my experiences proved valuable, and Varun's dedication and hard work were duly recognised.

Trustees

In November 2012, after becoming the Principal of my college, I had the privilege of meeting one Mrs. Ramani Shenoy, a generous philanthropist. Her family provided annual scholarships to bright students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mrs. Shenoy resided in a beautiful, spacious home in Palace Orchards. During my first visit, her hospitality instantly created a bond between us. She expressed a desire to meet my family, and on our next visit, Ravi and Hari joined me. She was delighted to engage with them, and we were impressed by her knowledge of current affairs, particularly in the field of education. It was simply amazing how she managed her spacious household single-handedly with only a cook and an attendant.

After my retirement, I introduced my colleague Chandrakala, the new Principal, to Mrs. Shenoy. I

informed her that Chandrakala would oversee the scholarship disbursements moving forward. Mrs. Shenoy welcomed us and discussed the process of selecting deserving students.

In 2017, Mrs. Shenoy's son Ashok and his wife Kiran visited Bangalore from the US. She invited Chandrakala and me for lunch to meet them. During this gathering, Mrs. Shenoy proposed that we become local Trustees of the *Ramani Shenoy Foundation*, while Ashok and Kiran would remain Managing Trustees. Although hesitant due to our personal commitments, we were persuaded by her assurance of guidance and support. In 2018, we officially became the Trustees. Our responsibilities included coordinating with the management and heads of various institutions to gather details about students' academic performance, financial needs, family backgrounds, and aspirations for further studies. We compiled this information into a list for Ashok, who made the final decisions. He then sent cheques, which we distributed to the institutions for students to collect.

In November 2024, when Ashok and Kiran visited Bangalore, the MLA management committee expressed a desire to meet them. So we accompanied them to the *Samaj* office of MLA,

where Chandrakala and I felt a wave of nostalgia, recalling our decades of service there.

The committee members, including second-generation members, welcomed us. They expressed gratitude for Ashok and Kiran's generosity and urged them to continue supporting deserving students. After the meeting, the Management honoured Ashok and Kiran, and to our surprise, Chandrakala and I were also recognized. We felt both embarrassed and moved when they insisted we sit for a photograph while they stood, a poignant reversal of roles from our days as Principals honouring the committee members at college events!

GIPA Honours Hari

On the afternoon of April 18th, 2025, I received an unexpected call from *Shatavadhani* Dr. R Ganesh to my utter surprise. He invited Ravi and me to attend a programme at the *Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs* (GIPA) the following evening, where our son, Hari, was to be felicitated. Overwhelmed with joy, I could not help but think of *Amma*, who would have been immensely proud of Hari's achievements. My thoughts drifted to October 2nd, 2016, when *Amma* and Hari's book, *Foggy Fool's Farrago*—the English translation of Dr. D V Gundappa's *Mankutimmana Kagga*—was launched at the same venue.

Beyond co-translating the *Kagga*, Hari has been pivotal in bringing out D V Gundappa's iconic writings in English, including his eight-volume *magnum opus Art Gallery of Memories*, *Jivana-dharma-yoga* (which has been admirably translated

by his friends Raghavendra and Sreelalitha), as well as DVG's writings about the epics, to name a few. Hari has happily toiled to bring out English translations of a few writings of his mentors *Nadoja* Dr. S R Ramaswamy and *Shatavadhani* Dr. R Ganesh.

The evening he was to be felicitated, Hari was set to deliver the concluding lecture on DVG's *Art Gallery of Memories*, about which he had been speaking spread across a few years.

Vasu *mama*, Ravi, and I arrived at GIPA, where we were welcomed by Dr. S R Ramaswamy, Dr. R Ganesh, *Sri* V Nagaraj (Hon. Secretary of the *Gokhale Institute*), and many of Hari's friends and well-wishers.

Sri B N Shashikiran opened the event with a welcome address. Dr. Ganesh spoke eloquently, praising Hari's diligence, meticulousness, selfless service, and unwavering dedication to literature and culture. He lauded Hari's ability to balance scholarly precision with passion for preserving and sharing knowledge.

GIPA honoured Hari with a shawl, a beautifully crafted Ganesha statue, a money purse, and other thoughtful gifts.

Dr. V B Arathi and her husband, *Sri* Shashi Koundinya of *Vibhu Academy*, also felicitated Hari. Arathi, a versatile scholar, writer, orator, painter, and singer presented him with a stunning painting of Goddess Sarasvati (which she had painted). Her charming gesture touched us all.

Later, Arathi invited Hari and me to her home for tea. We spent valuable time with her family, engaging in light-hearted conversation that made the evening memorable.

Saraswati Sahitya Puraskar

My classmate from school, Madhuri Bapat, invited me to an award ceremony held at the *Maharashtra Mandal* in Gandhinagar, Bangalore, on May 1st, 2025, coinciding with Maharashtra Day.

The *Saraswati Sahitya Puraskar* is presented in memory of Madhuri's mother, the late-lamented *Smt*. Saraswati Risbud. For the year 2025, it was given to the distinguished Kannada writer and critic, *Smt*. L V Shanthakumari, a retired English professor. During the event, Madhuri's translation of Dr. Avinash Wachasunder's book was released. Madhuri, an entrepreneur and active member of *Stree Sakhi*, was part of the organization's golden jubilee celebrations.

I was eager to attend this program for multiple reasons. Madhuri is a dear friend, and I deeply admire her quiet dedication to uplifting women through her work. Several times, when I was in

school and college, I have met Madhuri's mother, a National Awardee. I was also hoping to get a chance to reconnect with Madhuri's siblings, whom I had not seen since our school and college days. Further, I've known Shanthakumari Madam for a few years through Hari. She is a mentor and grandmother figure to him. I have visited her home a few times as well. Her erudition, dedication, and serene demeanour never fail to inspire a sense of calm in those around her. Learning that she was receiving an award instituted in *Smt*. Saraswati Risbud's name filled me with joy.

In her eloquent acceptance speech, Shanthakumari Madam emphasized the importance of translating literature between regional languages to foster cultural connections and mutual respect across states. She noted that without such translations, the rich literary traditions of different regions remain inaccessible, hindering inter-state cultural understanding.

Though the organizers primarily spoke in Marathi, Shanthakumari Madam delivered her address in Kannada, making it accessible to people like me. My classmates Usha and Sudha also attended, and we reminisced about our school days with Madhuri's siblings before parting ways, cherishing the reunion after so many years.

Naresh's Lec-Dem

During the December season in Chennai, I have attended numerous lecture-demonstrations by various scholars. However, last December, my nephew Naresh, a Sanskrit Professor at *Ashoka University*, delivered an exceptional lec-dem at the prestigious *Madras Music Academy*.

Naresh's presentation focused on the distinction between *naatika* and *naataka*. He skillfully selected *kavya*s from diverse regions such as Karnataka, Malwa, Madurai, and Tanjavur, showcasing how these works intricately embedded names of specific *raga*s. The *kavya*s also had details of the *raga lakshana*s and *tala lakshana*s, which Naresh brought to life by singing them in their respective *raga*s.

What stood out was the depth of the *kavya*s, which included vivid descriptions of dance movements and references to various musical instruments and their playing techniques. These details were both fascinating and delightful.

Naresh's extensive study of *kavya* literature, spanning ancient scriptures to more contemporary works, was evident throughout his presentation. At the session's conclusion, he confidently addressed challenging questions from senior scholars on the expert committee, earning their admiration and astonishment for his erudition.

I came to know of several aspects hidden in our *kavya*s. I was amazed at his knowledge and was impressed by his deeply researched scholarly presentation.

Fire to Frost

A MESMERIZING EXPERIENCE

The internationally acclaimed dancers, *Smt*. Nirupama and *Sri* T D Rajendra, are no strangers to the world of performing arts. They are good friends of Hari, and through him, they have also become our family friends.

In July 2024, they presented their renowned dance-drama production *Krishnaa – Fire to Frost* at *Chowdiah Memorial Hall*. The event was open to all. Hari, Vidya, and I, along with my friends Usha and Sudha, were thrilled to attend. Following Hari's advice, we arrived early and secured front-row seats. Within minutes, the hall was packed, with people standing along the sides and sitting in the aisles, eagerly awaiting the performance.

The evening began with a captivating introduction by Hari's friend, Arjun Bharadwaj, a multi-faceted scholar. Although I had seen *Fire to Frost*

before, Arjun's exceptional narration made the experience feel fresh and enchanting. Nirupama, Rajendra, and their talented team mesmerized the audience with their innovative choreography and several breathtaking moments. The performance was spectacular and earned a well-deserved standing ovation from the entire audience, along with those who had been standing throughout the show.

On a personal note, Nirupama and Rajendra surprised me with a visit on January 1st, 2025. It was a joy to spend time with them. During our conversation, I shared some of my crochet and knitting creations, which Nirupama admired.

Inspired by her appreciation, I crafted a few mobile-cum-spectacles covers as well as a poncho for her and sent them through Hari. She was delighted and expressed how much she valued their utility. I was overjoyed.

Recently, Nirupama invited me for Rajendra's 60th birthday, so I went with Hari. The entire venue was decorated so aesthetically and their students showed such affection for their *guru*s. I was amazed to witness this event that bore testament to the love and affection that Nirupama and Rajendra have earned from their students.

Old Melodies

A MEMORABLE EVENING

On a bright Sunday morning in April, Vasantha *akka* called to say that she, Suhas, and Manushi were planning to visit us. She told me to keep the evening free to attend a special music program of old hindi film songs at the *Chowdaiah Memorial Hall* knowing my love for them. The news was a pleasant surprise for me.

She had thoughtfully arranged for Suhas and Manushi to accompany me to "*Mere Sapno Ki Rani*," a concert presented by Prahlad Prasad and his talented ensemble, paying a grand tribute to the legendary composers S D Burman and R D Burman.

While Vasantha *akka* stayed back to spend time with Indiramma, the three of us headed to the event. The evening was a nostalgic journey, with professional singers performing the timeless songs

originally sung by icons like Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle, Manna Dey, Mahendra Kapoor, Talat Mahmood, and even the Burmans themselves. Many of these melodies were my all-time favorites, brought to life with a vibrant live orchestra. The performers, some of whom we knew personally, sang with remarkable skill, making the experience even more special.

Time seemed to slip away unnoticed as we immersed ourselves in the music. I was deeply touched by Suhas and Manushi's gesture—they had travelled all the way from South Bangalore to ensure I could attend this unforgettable program, held so close to home. It had been ages since I last experienced such a captivating evening of old melodies, and their thoughtfulness made it an evening that I will cherish for a long time.

Parva

A DAY-LONG SPECTACLE

After reading the *Mahabharata* a few years ago (the entire set of thirty-six volumes published by *Bharata Darshana*), I read Dr. S L Bhyrappa's novel *Parva*.

When I heard the news that *Parva* was adapted into a stage-play, I wanted to watch it. I shared this news with Vasu *mama*, *mami*, and Vidya and they were also interested in joining me.

I wanted to read the book once again before going to the play but I didn't have the time. Hari suggested that I could listen to an audiobook of the novel and shared the link. I listened to the entire story over a period of three weeks. With the story fresh in my mind, I was ready to witness the play.

We all went to *Chowdaiah Memorial Hall*, equipped with our food and water bag. Though

food was being supplied at the venue, we preferred to take our own food.

Vidya had booked middle row seats well in advance. So we sat well settled and were ready to watch the play.

The play started on time at around ten in the morning. There was a live music band with two artists. They played drums and announced the start of the play. The artists started appearing on the stage, got introduced to the role they were playing, and within minutes, we were all totally engrossed. There was pin-drop silence. Nobody wanted to miss even a single dialogue.

In between, the singer sang tunes according to the situations, with his amazing resonating voice.

Overall, there were three intervals of fifteen minutes' duration each for coffee and restroom breaks plus a thirty-minute lunch break. We all came out, sat comfortably in Vidya's car, which she had thoughtfully managed to park within the premises, ate our lunch and returned to our seats.

The play went on till 8 pm. None of us felt like getting up in the middle. The play was so engaging that we never realised that we sat through a day-long play!

The stage adaptation was presented by *Centre for Film & Drama* and was directed by noted actor-director-screenwriter *Sri* Prakash Belavadi. There were thirty-three actors collectively portraying 127 characters. This was their seventieth show on stage!

It was a well planned, meticulously organized, and beautifully presented play. There was a standing ovation for more than ten minutes, when the artists introduced themselves and when they came down towards the audience. We were surprised to know that all the artists have their own professions and that they have all come together to act only because of passion.

May their tribe increase!

Afterword

The last thirty-three months have been remarkable in my mother's life. It has been quite a spectacle to witness the manner in which she has dealt with her disease. In a measure no less has been my father's life, having to balance a number of issues—health, finance, family, and others. A ninety-eight-year-old dementia patient at home doesn't make it any easier. My grandmother has been steadily declining though her physical fitness is superb for a person of her age.

Amidst all these challenges, if Ram and I have been leading peaceful lives, at least a part of the credit should go to the fortitude inculcated in us, as part of our upbringing.

While playing a game of cards, we can't change the hand that is dealt to us but we certainly can choose how we play the game. When faced with a challenge, we can try to find a solution instead of

finding an excuse. When looking back at life, we can opt to be grateful for all that we have received from numerous well-wishers rather than corroding our mind with thoughts of people who betrayed us, humiliated us, or refused to help. This has been the path of the elders in my family. To the extent possible, they have led exemplary lives with what little they had, financially and intellectually.

The manner in which a noble person behaves in the face of impending death ought to be the model for all of us at all times. When *Amma* realized that she was fighting a life-threatening ailment, much of the temporary worries left her. She donated her clothes and gold, disposed off her assets, and sold away her silverware. She effortlessly cultivated detachment. This is by no means easy but to harbour feelings of such detachment while being young, healthy, and wealthy is really the holy grail!

It has been a delight to read through the pages of this book and I hope this inspires people from the older generation to jot down some of their memorable experiences. It will serve a twofold purpose: the elders will be spending their time productively and the youngsters will have something to savour in their twilight years, if not earlier.

—Hari Ravikumar

Hema Ravikumar (*b.* 1957, Bombay) completed her master's degree in Statistics from *Central College* in 1978 and joined the *Malleswaram Ladies Association Pre-University College* as a lecturer. She retired as the Principal of the college in 2015 after thirty-six years of teaching. She is the author of popular textbooks of Statistics for the pre-university level. Apart from being a paper-setter, a chief examiner, and a member of the syllabus committee, she has mentored thousands of students in Statistics. She is a trained Carnatic classical singer and also a member of *Rotary International*.